





Major and Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth in 1853 (from a daguerrotype in the possession of Mrs. Richard Fuller)



For  
my mother and father



# THE BURIED LIFE

A STUDY OF THE RELATION  
BETWEEN THACKERAY'S FICTION  
AND HIS PERSONAL HISTORY

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## PREFACE

THE present volume is a by product of work towards a comprehensive life of Thackeray on which I have been intermittently engaged since 1946. The detailed investigation of Thackeray's family background necessitated by this project led me to an increasing awareness of the extent to which his imaginative life was dependent for sustenance on the persons who figured most intimately in his personal history. When I was invited to speak at the Lowell Institute I accordingly chose as my topic a consideration of this relationship with particular emphasis on its consequences for Thackeray's fiction. The resulting lectures have been revised and extended since their delivery in February 1950 particularly in chapters one, five and eight. If chapter five has thereby attained a length disproportionate to its contribution to my principal theme I must plead in extenuation a desire to put on record the essential information regarding the original of Major Pendennis, a gentleman who has not previously figured in Thackerayan chronicles.

Much of what follows has been drawn from unpublished sources. Particularly in chapters two and four but to some extent throughout the book, I have used manuscript materials in the possession of Mrs. Richard Fuller Thackeray's granddaughter. In chapter five I have depended chiefly on the Wellesley Papers in the British Museum. Chapter six is based in large part on letters owned by Father Paul Brookfield, Mrs. Brookfield's grandson and by Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach. Chapter seven is enlivened by anecdotes and other information from the family archives of Mr. Evelyn Carmichael and Mrs. Tempé Monroe, collateral relatives of Major Carmichael-Smyth. I am duly grateful for the use of these varied data.

I must also record certain other obligations. Mr. Ralph Lowell, Trustee of the Lowell Institute, has kindly agreed to the publication of these lectures. My conclusions concerning the autobiographical background of *Esmond* were recorded in abbreviated form for the British Broadcasting Company's third program during the summer of 1949 and were afterwards published in the *Listener*. A summary of the same material appears

in my introduction to the Modern Library's College Edition of *Esmond* I thank the British Broadcasting Company and Random House for allowing me to reprint copyrighted material. I am indebted as well to my friends Gordon Haight of Yale University and Kathleen Tillotson of the University of London for their attentive reading of this volume and to Miss F. L. Rudston Brown, Honorary Librarian and one-time Secretary of the Royal Society of Literature, for the devoted care with which she has seen this volume through the press.

It only remains for me to note that a post-service fellowship in the humanities from the Rockefeller Foundation and a grant from the Graduate College of the University of Illinois enabled me to spend the academic year 1948-49 in England, where I made the inquiries on which this study rests.

G N R

Urbana, Illinois  
September, 1950

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE SEDUCTIONS OF SENTIMENT

#### I

IN the present century the prevailing attitude towards the Victorian age in England has twice undergone radical alteration. The prestige of the Victorians wavered during the Edwardian era and collapsed during the first World War. For a time it is true the Georgians continued to feel their fathers' example as a reproach, but in 1918 Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* revealed to his contemporaries how an oppressive heritage might be converted into a source of amusement. With Strachey's aid they discovered and exploited the typical mid-Victorian—a figure A. C. Bradley has noted "amply proving the creative energy of the Georgian imagination."<sup>1</sup> Beginning in the nineteen thirties and particularly during the second World War, however, the Victorian age regained general favor among the literate in England. Its renewed prestige may be attributed in part to the nostalgic fascination that a class now largely dispossessed has found in contemplating a social order in which their forebears still enjoyed special privileges and comforts. But admiration for the Victorians is today quite as frequently encountered among socialists as among Tories, and it is now assumed almost as uniformly in the *New Statesman* as in the *Spectator* that the Victorian age was one of the two supremely great epochs of English national life.

The reputation of Victorian literature has fallen and risen with the reputation of the period generally. Its dominant form, the novel, promises to be as popular in the nineteen fifties as it was unpopular in the nineteen twenties. Certain novelists of course have fared better than others in this wholesale reappraisal. We have witnessed in turn the revival of Anthony Trollope, of Dickens, of Henry James (a Victorian surely at least through *The Tragic Muse*) and of George Eliot.

There has been as yet no comparable return to Thackeray's fiction, though much has recently been written about him as

a person The response that greeted his *Letters and Private Papers* in 1945-46 demonstrated that for a small but by no means negligible group of readers he remains today what W C Brownell described him as being fifty years ago, "the most interesting personality, perhaps, that has expressed itself in prose"<sup>2</sup> Four biographical studies have appeared since the publication of his correspondence,<sup>3</sup> and three more have been announced<sup>4</sup> But apart from *Vanity Fair*, and to a lesser degree *Esmond*, his novels are not widely read While he has not been neglected by critics during the past twenty years,<sup>5</sup> the tone of references to him in *avant garde* writing has been condescending,<sup>6</sup> and no fresh perspective has been suggested that might disengage latent values in his work

The search for such a perspective might take the form of an exploration of qualities traditionally ascribed to Thackeray's novels which they are still admitted to possess, but which are currently unfashionable Alternatively, such a point of view might be disclosed by an inquiry regarding other and still esteemed qualities once confidently attributed to his fiction but now often denied to it

The first alternative is perhaps the more attractive We continue to grant that Thackeray is a master of panoramic fiction of the "crowded" as opposed to the "bare" novel<sup>7</sup> Everyone recognizes his wide range, the variety of characters that he understands, and the keen sense of society which enables him to present the general life of his time in terms of the individuals and social groups whose destinies he traces in his novels<sup>8</sup> These are important virtues, but they do not excite contemporary critics of fiction, who are inclined in this connection to echo a question posed by Henry James in his preface to *The Tragic Muse*

A picture without composition slights its most precious chance for beauty, and is moreover not composed at all unless the painter knows *how* that principle of health and safety, working as an absolutely premeditated art, has prevailed' There may in its absence be life, incontestably, as "The Newcomes" has life, as "Les Trois Mousquetaires," as Tolstoi's "Peace and War," have it, but what do such large, loose, baggy monsters, with their queer elements of the accidental and the arbitrary, artistically *mean*?<sup>9</sup>

James's description of panoramic fiction as "a picture without composition" rests on a fundamental error We shall never properly understand the "crowded" novel until we recognise that it possesses its own logical basis, just as does the "bare" novel We shall never properly appreciate its freedom of movement and richness of invention until we comprehend that it has

its own canons of relevance and function and that these canons operate none the less surely because the very complexity of the crowded novel prevents the conscious formulation of its rationale in the mind of the novelist and renders difficult the schematization of this rationale by the critic. But this is a task to be undertaken in a comprehensive study of fiction not in a monograph on a single author and I pass regretfully to my second alternative.

If the comprehensiveness of Thackeray's vision of life is still granted the same cannot be said for its authority. Yet by his contemporaries and by the two generations of readers who followed them Thackeray was praised above all for his profound insight into human nature for his sagacity and for the wit, eloquence and distinction of his prose. Nor is it difficult to find ample warrant for such praise in his fiction. Certain of Thackeray's men and women remain unquestioned triumphs of characterization: witness Becky Sharp, Jos Sedley, Rawdon Crawley and old Miss Crawley in *Lansbury Fair*; Major Pendennis in *Pendennis*; Barnes Newcome in *The Newcomes*; and the two incarnations of Beatrix Farnham in *Esmond* and in *The Virginians*. As for criticism of life brilliantly expressed Thackeray's great novels of modern life to cite no other part of his work contain a stock of epigrams sufficient to rank him with La Bruyère or Vauvenargues. Consider the acid commentary that accompanies his narrative in *Lansbury Fair*: his observation that the younger Sir Pitt Crawley failed somehow in spite of a mediocrity which ought to have insured any man a success;<sup>10</sup> his assertion that "One of the great conditions of anger and hatred is that you must tell and believe lies against the hated object in order to be consistent."<sup>11</sup> or his remark that "If a man's character is to be abused say what you will there's nobody like a relation to do the business."<sup>12</sup> If Thackeray is less eager to wound in *Pendennis* his new tolerance has not blunted his sense of life's ironies. One may prefer indeed the quieter and simpler effects of the later novel. He writes of the farewell dinner given to Captain Costigan upon his departure from Chatterton: "The evening was a great triumph for him—it ended. All triumphs and all evenings end."<sup>13</sup> Cured of his infatuation with the Fotheringhay Pen talks about her one moonlight night on Chatterton bridge with the old fiddler Bowes who has also loved her. Thackeray concludes his account of the episode: "The little flaming spark [from Pan's cigar] dropped into the water below and disappeared and Pen as he rode home that night actually

thought about somebody but himself”<sup>14</sup> Sometimes Thackeray makes his point without overt explanation, as in the scene in Fleet Prison, where the publisher Bungay sits by, while his incarcerated editor Captain Shandon pens the prospectus for a new paper “The *Pall Mall Gazette* is written by gentlemen for gentlemen,” writes the Captain, “its conductors speak to the classes in which they live and were born”<sup>15</sup> In *The Newcomes* Thackeray’s aphorisms are tinged by a deepening sadness “In youth, you see, one is touched by kindness,” he remarks of Pen’s instant liking for Colonel Newcome “A man of the world may, of course, be grateful or not as he chooses”<sup>16</sup> And in this novel there is at least one maxim worthy of La Rochefoucauld at his best, Thackeray’s proposition that “The true pleasure of life is to live with your inferiors”<sup>17</sup>

If Thackeray’s characters had always been concerned with the mastery that he displays in *Becky* and *Major Pendennis*, if he had always written as in the passages just cited, we would today question the authority with which he speaks no more than did his first readers At his best he commands a view of life that one readily accepts, to use Mr T S Eliot’s test, “as coherent, mature, and founded on the facts of experience”<sup>18</sup> But elsewhere in his fiction the confidence of the modern reader is shaken by the most surprising lapses in Thackeray’s control The temptations to which Thackeray sometimes succumbed are perhaps most tellingly described by Joseph Conrad, who was himself attracted by the same lures Conrad wrote of Maupassant

The inherent greatness of the man consists in this, that he will let none of the fascinations that beset a writer working in loneliness turn him away from the straight path, from the vouchsafed vision of excellence He will not be led into perdition by the seductions of sentiment, of eloquence, of humour, of pathos, of all that splendid pageant of faults that pass between the writer and his probity on the blank sheet of paper, like the glittering cortège of deadly sins before the austere anchorite in the desert air of Thebaïde<sup>19</sup>

For Thackeray and his Victorian readers sentiment, eloquence, humour, and pathos were not faults but excellences Concerning humour and perhaps eloquence, some of us still side with the Victorians, despite the modern orthodoxy which holds that these effects involve pre-assumptions which hamper the novelist in his aim of achieving “the non-poetic statement of a poetic truth”<sup>20</sup> But it is otherwise with sentiment and pathos, at any rate of the sort that Thackeray often provides A palpable shift in taste must here be taken into account It may be maintained that

the sources of Thackeray's sentimentalism were closely linked to the sources of his greatest strength but there can be no doubt that we regard the thing itself in a very different light than did the Victorians. How oddly it strikes us to find even George Eliot the novelist among Thackeray's contemporaries whose work is least touched by sentimentality complimenting her friend Miss Hennell upon the latter's essay *Answers of Infidelity* in these terms

Some of your own passages I think very admirable—some of them made me cry which is always a sign of the highest pleasure writing can give me.<sup>21</sup>

As we shall see Thackeray's first readers thought that he confined himself much too strictly to satire and realism and consequently presented an unduly gloomy and disheartening view of life. Far from being distressed by the failure in control which we today detect in his sentimental and pathetic passages they encouraged him to exploit these resources. His fiction performed for many of them the same service that Wordsworth's poetry performed for John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold: it loosed their hearts in tears and made them feel. Thackeray's more intelligent admirers were no doubt always aware that his sentimental effects presupposed a failure to judge his characters accurately but they justified this failure on the same grounds that Ruskin justifies certain instances of the pathetic fallacy in the description of natural objects

Examine the point in question [Ruskin writes in *Modern Painters*]—namely the difference between the ordinary proper and true appearances of things to us; and the extraordinary or false appearances, when we are under the influence of emotion, or contemplative fancy; false appearances, I say as being entirely unconnected with any real power or character in the object, and only imputed to it by us. Now so long as we see that the *feeling* is true, we pardon, or are even pleased by the confessed fallacy of sight which it induces.<sup>22</sup>

When Walter Bagehot described Thackeray as our great sentimentalist<sup>23</sup> in 1864 he intended to imply praise rather than blame by the phrase

As the English public grew familiar with the rigors of French and Russian fiction towards the end of the nineteenth century Thackerayan realism could no longer be regarded as particularly severe. In *Victorian Prose Masters* (1901) W. C. Brownell began his consideration of Thackeray by noting

Nothing of the kind is more striking than the change that has come over popular feeling with regard to his works. Instead of cynicism he is now reproached with sentimentality by his censors. Time has brought about a better understanding



of the man, and at the same time has modified the popular craving for the representation of life as a fairy-tale, and the popular disposition to resent portraiture as calumny.<sup>24</sup>

This shift in attitude has been intensified in our own time, as pronounced emotional coloring has come to be increasingly avoided by writers of serious fiction. Indeed, the sentimental element in Thackeray's fiction has now the odd effect of seeming to associate it with those modern media of mass entertainment in which conventional emotional responses still parade unabashed, the film, the slick-magazine story, and the radio-serial.

Recent critics of Thackeray's fiction have viewed the problem presented by his sentimentalism in various ways. A few belated adherents to the genteel tradition still ignore it entirely. At the opposite end of the scale is an occasional extremist for whom it spoils Thackeray's work, Mr J. Y. T. Greig, for example, is driven by Thackeray's sentimental passages to regard him, "in spite of his many gifts, as a novelist *manqué*"<sup>25</sup>. But usually modern critics attempt to palliate Thackeray's sentimental excesses by arguing that they are concessions to the taste of his age. Their guide in interpreting Thackeray's fiction is John Stuart Mill's Victorian rephrasing of Bacon's most celebrated maxim: "Whoever has a wife and children has given hostages to Mrs Grundy."<sup>26</sup> Miss Elizabeth Drew accordingly writes

It is impossible as we read Thackeray not to be convinced that he had the greatest contempt for the opinion of his day as to what made a 'good woman'. [He insists] that Amelia is the perfect type of sweet selfless womanhood. This is what his age wanted to think, and that is what he feels he must give them.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly Mr G. U. Ellis holds that Thackeray's domestic yardstick for measuring character arouses

the suspicion that it is a testimony to the sensibilities of his audience rather than to the partialities of his own mind. It will probably always remain a literary problem to distinguish between what Thackeray really felt about the domestic quality in literature and what he was compelled to say.<sup>28</sup>

None of these divergent views has much to recommend it. We do Thackeray no service by ignoring the uneasiness that his sentimentality sometimes occasions us. It is absurd to call the author of *Vanity Fair* and *Esmond* a "novelist *manqué*". And the well-meaning but misguided extenuations advanced by such critics as Miss Drew and Mr Ellis—which were always of dubious utility, since they defended Thackeray's intelligence at the expense of his sincerity—could not be credited after the details of his personal history became known through his *Letters and Private Papers*.

A close examination of the sentimental element in Thackeray's fiction with the view of determining its cause, nature and extent, will suggest a more valid attitude towards the problem that it presents to the modern reader. The basic data for such an inquiry are to be found in the relation between Thackeray's personal history and his imaginative life. By following biographical clues which in Thackeray's case have far more than merely anecdotal interest, it will be possible to delimit with some precision the area in which he no longer speaks to us with authority. The establishment of these boundaries will in turn reinforce our confidence in Thackeray's general mastery of experience, a confidence without which no novelist can retain classic rank.

## II

We can first make certain broad preliminary discriminations concerning the part of life where Thackeray's perspicacity failed him and the corresponding area of his fiction where his sentimental bias most clearly reveals itself. As we encounter passage after passage in Thackeray's novels in which he exalts simplicity, innocence and softheartedness, we grow ill at ease and rebellious, not because he admires these estimable qualities, but because of the disproportionate emphasis that he gives them. It gradually comes home to us that his basic ethical assumption may be summed up in precisely those lines which Matthew Arnold cites to illustrate Burns's lack of "high seriousness":

To make a happy fire-side elime  
To women and wife,  
That's the true pathos and sublime  
Of human life."<sup>20</sup>

Such importance does Thackeray attach to the domestic affections, indeed, that he seems to leave no place for other and perhaps higher motives.

That Thackeray's devotion to the domestic affections is exaggerated appears most clearly when the characters in his novels who most fully represent these qualities are studied. Thackeray's attitude towards Colonel Newcome, for example, or towards the whimpering little goddess whom he deifies in every novel (as an irreverent dissenter among Victorian reviewers phrased it)<sup>21</sup> is marked unmistakably by what George Bernard Shaw has bluntly termed an "affectionate and admiring love of sentimental stupidity for its own sake."<sup>21</sup> To examine

these characters, and certain others chosen for purposes of contrast, in relation to the relatives and friends from whom Thackeray drew them will be the main business of this book

Now, the excesses of psychological critics, impelled by what Stevenson called an "unprincipled avidity after effect"<sup>32</sup> into equating the wildest and most improbable conjectures with demonstrated fact,<sup>33</sup> have long since led the wary reader to regard imputed autobiography and asserted "originals" with extreme scepticism. Since I share this scepticism, I shall advance no autobiographical parallels that do not seem to me unmistakable, and with three exceptions<sup>34</sup> I shall consider only characters whose "originals" Thackeray has himself identified. Even so, I should hesitate to follow this line of investigation, if it were not possible to ground it solidly on certain generalizations concerning the creative process in Thackeray.

In the last analysis all fiction is inevitably autobiographical, for no novelist can transcend the limits of his own personality and experience. But writers of fiction can be divided into two groups as regards the degree of impersonality that they strive to attain. Henry James may stand as an exemplar of the objective method followed by most modern novelists. James was determined to avoid both self-revelation, which he contemptuously called "the lyric leak,"<sup>35</sup> and direct portraiture from life. No doubt his shorter tales sometimes reflect the involvements that stirred him most in his own life, occasionally quite directly, as in his stories about artists and writers, but in his novels the autobiographical element is so veiled as to be unrecognizable. As to "originals," we have only to recall his reply when taxed by his brother William with having drawn Miss Birdseye in *The Bostonians* from Elizabeth Peabody: "Miss Birdseye was evolved entirely from my moral consciousness," he wrote, "like every other person I have ever drawn."<sup>36</sup> James's point of departure was typically a "stray suggestion," a "wandering word," a "vague echo,"<sup>37</sup> which he proceeded to elaborate into the most complicated constructions. It mattered not how remote his *donnée* might be from his own experience. If you have "for fiction, the root of the matter in you," he insisted, "you are not really helpless, not without your resource, even before mysteries abysmal."<sup>38</sup>

Admiration for James's achievement should not blind us to the very different relation between fiction and experience that obtains with most of the world's great novelists. In the books of these less austere masters—Balzac, Dickens, Dostoevski,

Proust and Tolstoi are among their number— there is an abundance of autobiography and portraiture from life. The reserve that James cultivated was foreign to those confiding geniuses who seemed to work at their best under the pressure of direct personal experience. Somerset Maugham speaks for them in the following passage from *The Summing Up*

I have been blamed because I have drawn my characters from living persons, and from criticisms that I have read one might suppose that nobody had ever done this before. That is nonsense. It is the universal custom. Turgenev stated that he could not create a character at all unless as a starting point he could fix his imagination on a living person. I suspect that the writers who deny that they use actual persons deceive themselves (which is not impossible, since you can be a very good novelist without being very intelligent) or deceive us. I should say that the practice of drawing characters from actual models is not only universal but necessary.<sup>30</sup>

Thackeray at any rate followed the practice that Maugham describes. Though he nowhere declares himself as explicitly as James or Maugham his method of character creation can be formulated with some confidence from hints in his letters and recorded conversation. We may start with his defence of realism in a letter to David Masson concerning the latter's essay on *David Copperfield* and *Pendennis*

I quarrel with his Art in many respects [Thackeray writes of Dickens]: wh. I don't think represents Nature duly; for instance, Micawber appears to me an exaggeration of a man, as his name is of a name. It is delightful and makes me laugh; but it is no more a real man than my friend Punch is; and in so far I protest against him— holding that the Art of Novels is to represent Nature; to convey as strongly as possible the sentiment of reality—in tragedy or a poem or a lofty drama you aim at producing different emotions; the figures moving, and their words sounding heroically; but in a drawing-room drama a coat is a coat and a poker a poker; and must be nothing else according to my ethics, not an embroidered tunic nor a great red hot instrument like the Pantomime weapon.<sup>31</sup>

Thackeray's aim, in other words was to portray life directly without distortion or idealization.

Indeed Thackeray's habits of work sometimes made for an almost journalistic directness of reporting with a printer's deadline to meet he inevitably reflected in his fiction the immediate concerns of his day-to-day life. What he says of Sterne applies equally to himself

A perilous trade, indeed, is that of a man who has to bring his tears and laughter his recollections, his personal griefs and joys, his private thoughts and feelings to market, to write them on paper and sell them for money.<sup>32</sup>

Closely scrutinized his novels turn out to afford a kind of diary of his intimate life. Have the Dublin newspapers protested

intemperately against a fancied insult in *Pendennis* to a favorite Irish soprano? An initial letter in a later number of the novel shows Thackeray beset by Irish raffs, who hide their own countenances behind masks of the lady's face.<sup>42</sup> Has John Forster in the *Examiner* attacked Thackeray's lectures on the English Humorists out of injudicious loyalty to Dickens? He shortly figures in *Esmond* as Tom Boxer, who because he is "Mr. Congreve's man," falls foul in the *Observer* of a new comedy by Dick Steele.<sup>43</sup> Does Edmund Yates annoy Thackeray by an offensive article in *Town Talk*? Pointed references to Young Grubstreet, Tom Garbage, and the *Kennel Miscellany* appear in *The Virginians*.<sup>44</sup>

But these incidental autobiographical touches have hardly more critical significance than the topical allusions in an Elizabethan play. Thackeray's novels are a reflection of his intimate experience in a deeper sense. He drew many of his principal characters from life, quite often choosing as models persons to whom he was bound by close emotional ties. He was entirely candid in acknowledging this relationship. Whitwell Elwin noted in 1857 that Thackeray

talks quite freely and simply of his own writings—tells a story, and then adds, that it suggested such and such a trait of one of his characters. He said, 'People tell me such and such a character is not natural—but I / now it is natural, that is to the life.'<sup>45</sup>

We shall note how Thackeray himself identified the "originals" of Amelia of Helen Pendennis, of Lord and Lady Castlewood and Harry Esmond, and of Colonel Newcome. His models for many other characters can be determined with equal certainty.

Thackeray followed a fixed pattern in portraying characters from life. Each is presented initially in a comprehensive sketch which includes a good many details from the actual personality and career of his model. But after the fictional personage is established, he takes on a life of his own, distinct from that of his original. "The characters once created *lead me*," Thackeray asserted, "and I follow where they direct."<sup>46</sup> They formed an imaginary society in his mind, of which he preferred to regard himself as merely the deeply interested observer and recorder. "Papa became quite fond of his characters," his daughter testifies, "they seemed alive to him."<sup>47</sup> He said of the figures in *Vanity Fair*, "I believe perfectly in all those people",<sup>48</sup> and on finishing *The Newcomes* he noted that he was "quite sorry to part with a number of kind people with whom I had been living and talking these 20 months past."<sup>49</sup> We shall see in

later chapters how he disclaimed control over the actions of Lady Castlewood Harry Edmond and Colonel Newcome declaring in one instance of the provoking behaviour of the last "it was in him to do it. He must."<sup>50</sup>

Yet despite Thackeray's surrender to his characters they remained always anchored to their originals because of his conviction that personality does not change with the passage of time though different facets of it may emerge under different circumstances. This belief is stated on many occasions in his fiction but never more eloquently than in *Pendennis*:

Are you not awe-stricken, you, friendly reader [Thackeray inquires], who taking the page up for a moment's light reading, lay it down, perchance, for a graver reflection,—to think how you,—who have consummated your success or your disaster—may be holding marked station, or a hopeless and nameless place in the crowd—who have passed through how many struggles of defeat, success, crime, remorse to yourself only known!—who may have loved and grown cold, wept and laughed again, how often!—to think how you are the same You, whom in childhood you remember before the voyage of life began? It has been prosperous, and you are riding into port, the people hurraing and the guns saluting,—and the lucky captain bows from the ship's side and there is a care under the star on his breast which nobody knows of; or you are wrecked and lashed, hopeless, to a solitary spar out at sea—the sinking man and the successful one are thinking each about home very likely and remembering the time when they were children—alone on the hopeless spar—drowning out of sight; alone in the midst of the crowd applauding you.<sup>51</sup>

Where George Eliot's preoccupation in her later novels with the development of character led her to concentrate on the suppressed transitions that unite all contrasts Thackeray was concerned rather with showing how the latent possibilities of constant personalities are brought out by the varying hazards of life. His principal figures follow much the same path. Amelia Helen Pendennis Lady Castlewood and Colonel Newcome begin in prosperity endure heavy misfortune and are reduced at last in Henry James's words to "the condition of a humble heart—a bowed head, a patient wonder—a suspended judgment before the awful will and the mysterious decrees of Providence."<sup>52</sup> They end their fictional careers chastened but essentially unchanged.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE MAKING OF A NOVELIST

#### I

"It takes three generations to make a gentleman," Thackeray used to say,<sup>1</sup> mindful of the compact and influential family corporation to which his grandfather and father belonged. The Thackerays were a closely knit Anglo-Indian clan that enjoyed a strong interest in the East India Company's civil service. If the humiliation that Dickens felt at the recollection of his grandparents in domestic service and his parents in Fleet Prison helped to make him the disinherited waif of Santayana's phrase, cut off from the past and hostile to it,<sup>2</sup> the pride that Thackeray took in his family and its traditions made the imaginative exploration of earlier eras a constant delight and solace to him. He was born within the charmed circle of the upper world, a circumstance that affected his development in many ways.

His father, Richmond Thackeray, had risen rapidly in the East India Company's service after his arrival in Bengal in 1798. He became one of the great gentlemen of Calcutta, living in state at his house in Chowringhee, with a retinue of sixty or seventy servants, an extensive stable, a cellar filled with claret and madeira, a native mistress, and the other appurtenances of a man of position.<sup>3</sup> When in 1810 he married Anne Becher, herself the daughter of a Bengal civil servant, he pensioned off his mistress and illegitimate child, but did not otherwise modify his splendid way of life. During the following year he succeeded to the Collectorship of the twenty-four Pergunnahs, a post worth more than £4000 a year. When he died in 1815, he left behind him a fortune of £17,000.

His only son, William Makepeace Thackeray, had been born late in the hot and rainy July of 1811. The boy was a seven months baby, and the doctor who delivered him informed his mother that "it was happy for her that he was, as otherwise she must have died." Told that she could bear no further children, she lavished all her love on William, and the boy, who was

extraordinarily sensitive and impressible from his earliest years responded with equal fervor. For the rest he was brought up like a little prince. Two native attendants were devoted to his exclusive service and he passed his time playing in the large high-ceilinged rooms of his father's great house or seeing the sights of Calcutta—the carriages on the Esplanade or the crocodiles in the Ganges—from the neat oxen-drawn carriage in which he rode with his black nurse.

Late in 1816 when William was five it became necessary to send him to England.

What a strange pathos seems to me to accompany all our Indian story! [Thackeray was later to exclaim.] The family must be broken up. Keep the flowers of your home beyond a certain time and the sickening buds wither and die. In America it is from the breast of a poor slave that a child is taken; in India it is from the wife and from under the palace of a splendid proconsul.<sup>4</sup>

During his four months aboard the Indiaman *Prince Regent* the boy continued to be well cared for by his own native servant and by a close friend of the family who was also making the voyage. But once in England he found himself plunged abruptly into a hostile world. Kind but preoccupied relatives dispatched him to a school kept by a certain Mr and Mrs Arthur in Southampton an establishment that must be ranked in regard to comfort and efficiency considerably below Lowood School in *Jane Eyre* if a little higher than Dotheboys Hall in *Nicholas Nickleby*. What a dreadful place that private school was Thackeray recalled forty five years later—cold chilblains bad dinners not enough victuals and caning awful! Elsewhere in the *Roundabout Papers* he continues [It] was governed by a horrible little tyrant who made our young lives so miserable that I remember kneeling by my little bed of a night and saying Pray God, I may dream of my mother.<sup>5</sup>

The year that Thackeray spent at the Arthurs' school shaped his character quite as decisively as Kipling's was formed by the three years of childhood misery which he records in "Baa Baa Black Sheep" or Dickens's by the months of moral isolation as a blacking factory worker which he describes in his fragmentary autobiography.<sup>6</sup> All, in Kipling's words, knew the worst too young,<sup>7</sup> but Thackeray was the most defenceless of the three. Kipling had a companion in his sister and Dickens was a mature and self-reliant eleven, when they were first introduced to the cruelties and meannesses of life. Thackeray faced his ordeal alone when he was barely six. He glanced at this experience in



*Esmond* "The unhappiness of those days is long forgiven, though they cast a shade of melancholy over the child's youth, which will accompany him, no doubt, to the end of his days as those tender twigs are bent the trees grow afterwards" <sup>10</sup>

In the following year Thackeray's relatives removed him to a reputable school, where he found existence more tolerable. He had a dreary time, nonetheless, until his mother and her second husband, Major Carmichael-Smyth, returned from India in 1820. Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth thus describes the reunion:

He could not speak but kissed me & looked at me again & again, I could almost have said 'Lord now let thou thy servant depart in peace for mine eyes have seen thy salvation' <sup>11</sup>

Not did Thackeray's passionate love diminish as he grew accustomed to being once more with his mother.

Nothing is like my William's affection [she wrote a few days later] he takes my hand and kisses it and looks at me as if he never could look long enough, the other day he said to me 'Mama it's a long time since I have seen a Play and I should like to have a treat' 'Very well dear I said if there's a Theatre at Gosport you shall go, but I can't go with you' 'Then I'm sure I shan't what's the use of going without you I had rather see you than the play' <sup>12</sup>

After four years of loneliness Thackeray found himself surrounded once more by the cherishing warmth of maternal affection. This experience, repeated—though with less intensity—whenever he returned home from school during the remainder of his boyhood, fixed his outlook on life. "All sorts of recollections of my youth came back to me", he noted in his diary many years afterwards, upon revisiting one of his childhood homes, 'dark and sad and painful with my dear good mother as a gentle angel interposing between me and misery' <sup>13</sup> Thackeray came to see life permanently in terms of a dichotomy between the warmth and trust of a happy home circle and the brutality or indifference of the outside world. And his remembrance of what his mother had been to him when he was a boy created in him a permanent need for the companionship of a woman whom he could love and in whom he could confide on much the same terms.

## II

Even after the Carmichael-Smyths' return, Thackeray spent only his summer vacations with them. It was necessary that a boy of his position and prospects should receive "the education of a gentleman," and he was accordingly sent for six years to the

London Charterhouse where his stepfather had been before him Sydney Smith compared life in the English public schools of this period to the vegetable struggle of a forest.<sup>14</sup> Thackeray was not well equipped for such a battle. His earlier training had been inadequate and Charterhouse gave him no opportunity to make up lost ground. Having no stimulus to intelligent curiosity he fell into habits of listlessness shrinking both from his masters and the subjects that they taught.

Among his companions he fared better for though near sightedness made him inept at games he was liked for his humor sociability and good temper. Yet even outside of school hours Thackeray found his first three years at Charterhouse a trial. He boarded at school in an extremely overcrowded and uncomfortable house. Left to their own devices when not in the class room, the boys formed a primitive Spartan society in which *force majeure* mitigated only by a rudimentary and erratic sense of fair play was the sole authority. A rigorous system of flogging prevailed which authorized almost any extreme of brutality. Thackeray had been at Charterhouse only a few months when his nose was permanently flattened during one of the boxing matches which furnished the school its principal amusement.

Thackeray's later years at Charterhouse were more tolerable. He was then allowed to live in relative comfort and decency in a private home near the school with fellow boarders who also preferred the novels poetry and magazine essays of the day to the classics and mathematics taught in class. Reading led to imitation and by the time Thackeray left Charterhouse he liked to write almost as much as he liked to draw a pursuit in which he had displayed marked talent from earliest childhood. Nor should the usefulness to him in other ways of early immersion in the microcosm of a public school<sup>15</sup> be denied. Six years of the give-and take of a communal life brought him an early acquaintance with the diversities of human nature and taught him how to live in society to see and enjoy its humors to meet its difficulties cheerfully and intelligently.

From Charterhouse Thackeray proceeded in 1829 to Trinity College Cambridge. Here too though he tried for an honors degree he found himself unable to achieve distinction in a curriculum limited to classics mathematics and philosophy and he again drifted into idleness. During his second year he fell in with a set of fast men from whom he picked up expensive tastes. He grew fond of gambling playing first with his college friends but eventually being marked down as a pigeon ready

for plucking by professional gamblers, one of whom was the decayed gentleman that later served as his model for Mr Deucece. These sharpers won from him I O U's for £1,500, which he paid when he came into his fortune in 1832.

Meanwhile, Thackeray had given up the university after five terms, passed a winter in the friendly, polyglot society of Weimar, and settled down at the Middle Temple with the intention of studying law. Once more, however, he found himself incapable of steady application to work that he disliked. He began to gamble again, and lost more than £600 during a single evening. He bought a moribund weekly paper called the *National Standard*, which expired under his editorship. For a time he even essayed the most ungentlemanly occupation of bill-discounting. But none of these employments held his interest and he determined at last to become a painter. In July of 1833, he wrote to his mother, who opposed his decision because of the low social status then occupied by artists:

I think I can draw better than do anything else & certainly like it better than any other occupation why shouldn't I?—It requires a three years apprenticeship however, wh. is not agreeable—but afterwards the way is clear & pleasant enough, & doubly so for an independent man who is not obliged to look to his brush for his livelihood.<sup>16</sup>

The Thackeray who wrote this letter was a well-to-do young gentleman proposing to amuse himself by dabbling in the arts. But a few months later most of the rest of his inheritance was lost in the failure of a Calcutta agency house, and when Thackeray settled in Paris at the end of 1833, he was a struggling apprentice painter with only a few hundred pounds between himself and poverty.

If we penetrate Thackeray's intimate existence between 1830, when he left Cambridge, and 1833, when he lost his fortune, we find that this seemingly careless and superior young man, hanging loose upon the town, was filled with disgust and self-contempt, yet quite incapable of altering his mode of life. On his twentieth birthday he wrote to Edward FitzGerald:

I was looking back yesterday, & I cannot find a single day in the course of my life which has been properly employed—I can only behold a melancholy succession of idleness & dissipation, which now leaves me without mental satisfaction, & I fear without proper repentance.<sup>17</sup>

This was to be his prevailing mood whenever—and such moments became increasingly frequent—he gave serious consideration to his way of life.



(A partial copy of the)

Jane, dau of  
Patrick Persso of  
Springgarden, Co  
Galway, Esq

Matthew Shapero, married  
Esq of Lodge James Gallagher  
Galway, Barrister of the Co  
at law, died 17 Shgo  
aged about 6

Merrick Shawo  
Lieut - Colonel  
76th Regiment  
of Foot

James Shawo

Henry Shawo  
Lieut 71th foot  
Killed in India,  
1799

Merrick Arthur  
Gothin Shawo,  
born at Walter  
Vreodun, Batavia,  
Java, 28 Nov  
1814, married 8  
Nov 1853 at St  
Michaels Church,  
Bongal

Ellen, 3rd dau of  
George and Susan  
Cattell, born at  
Kidderporo,  
cutta, India,  
Dec 1833  
Christened at  
Cathedral  
Calcutta

In a sense it was a relief to him to lose his fortune, for with it went the means to indulge his taste for idleness and dissipation. For a while he was very happy studying to be a painter—throughout his life painting remained the employment from which he derived most pleasure—but by the early months of 1835 it had become clear to him that he could never hope to achieve artistic success. At this time he wrote to his friend Frank Stone who was already a flourishing genre painter

I am in a state of despair—I have got enough torn-up pictures to roast an ox by— I have become latterly so disgusted with myself and art and every thing belonging to it, that for a month past I have been lying on sofas reading novels, and never touching a pencil.

In those six months, I have not done a thing worth looking at. If in another six months, I can do no better I will arise and go out and hang myself.<sup>18</sup>

### III

Thackeray was rescued from his mood of settled despondency in August of 1835 when he met nineteen year-old Isabella Shawe at a Parisian boarding house where she lived with her mother and sister. It was not long before he told a cousin that he was desperately in love with a girl without a penny in the world adding I will if I can bolt before I have committed myself for better or worse. But I don't think that I shall have the power.<sup>19</sup> It was curious to see Thackeray and Isabella together a friend recalls for he was six feet three and she was below the middle height so that she could barely reach his arm.<sup>20</sup> Though not pretty she was pleasing in appearance her best feature being her brilliant red hair. Her manner was very quiet and subdued, that of a shy child rather than of a woman and her dependence on her mother was almost painful to observe. She had a passion for music and her chief pleasure was to play on the piano and sing the arias of Bellini and Donizetti. Thackeray was attracted by her ethereal delicacy her simplicity and her entire freshness and innocence. Your little red polled ghost pursues me everywhere" he wrote a few months later the phantoms of some of your songs are always in my ears.<sup>21</sup>

During the winter of 1835-36 Thackeray came to know something of the Shawe family. Mrs Shawe had been born a Croagh of Laurentanum House county Cork.<sup>22</sup> She married another member of the minor Anglo-Irish gentry Matthew Shawe the son of a Galway barrister. Lt. Col. Shawe died in 1825 in India after attaining command of the 84th Foot as the culmination

of a distinguished military career, leaving his widow and five children scantily provided for by his savings and army pension <sup>23</sup> Having returned home from the east, Mrs Shawe found it necessary to conserve her income by living abroad. But life in a Parisian boarding house did not satisfy this lady's sense of her social claims. She missed the "grand house in the country" where she had grown up, and the camp and garrison society that had deferred to her as the Colonel's lady. She "talked as big as St Paul's," Thackeray noted, <sup>24</sup> about her departed glories and the heroism with which she had borne life's trials. She looked forward to the day when her daughters would retrieve the family fortunes by great marriages, but for the present she wanted them to live for her and jealously discouraged their admirers.

Thackeray took an instant dislike to her. Anything but a humble man, even in misfortune, he was from the first impatient of her claims to superiority. He had the civilian's indifference to military distinction and the Englishman's scepticism regarding Irish social position. Some years later he was delighted to have his reservations about the Creaghs and their pinchbeck grandeur confirmed by Mrs Shawe's son Arthur, who told him that "They are all hated in the county to a wonderful degree, vulgar, stingy, extravagant, bad landlords, bad neighbours and the juice knows what" <sup>25</sup>

Mrs Shawe returned Thackeray's hostility with interest. Too dull to recognize his ability, she saw in him merely the ugly impertinent son of a Bengal civilian (one of the "honourable Cheesemonger-Masters" that Indian military society looked down upon), without money without even a respectable profession, who yet had the insolence to criticize and laugh at her.

Their duel over Isabella, for such it was, though neither may consciously have regarded it in that light, was protracted through an entire year. Thackeray's problem was a complicated one. Passionately in love with Isabella, he sensed that it was unhealthy for her to remain longer within the circle of her mother's excessive affection. Yet he could not propose marriage, for he had no money. At last Major Carmichael-Smyth intervened. He invested a large part of his remaining fortune in a company organized to publish a new paper called the *Constitutional*, with the understanding that Thackeray should be employed on its staff.

While she was secure in the knowledge that Thackeray could not afford to marry, Mrs Shawe fought a waiting campaign.

But this new circumstance threatened her with the immediate loss of her daughter and she resorted to drastic measures. In April 1836 Thackeray wrote to Isabella announcing that he was to be Paris correspondent of the *Constitutional*

Does this news please you as it does me? [he asked]. Are you ready and willing to give up your home, & your bedfellow and your kind mother to share the fate of a sulky grey headed old fellow with a small income & a broken nose?—Dear little woman, think a great deal on this now for it seems to me that up to the present time (& considering the small chance of our union you were wise) you have avoided any thoughts as to the change of your condition, & the change of sentiments & of duties, wh. your marriage with me must entail.<sup>24</sup>

These unguarded sentences gave Mrs Shawe her opportunity. She told Isabella that Thackeray was trying to separate mother and daughter—she worked on her child's fear of the unknown trials that marriage would bring. A lover's quarrel resulted but it was soon made up—and after it was over Thackeray later reminded Isabella—'we made a kind of vow that happen what would—you and I were bound together and married before God.'<sup>25</sup>

This vow was soon put to the test for Mrs Shawe shortly afterwards sought to break off the engagement by other means. In July she took lodgings in another part of Paris and forbade Thackeray to visit Isabella. With the aid of a friendly servant he continued to correspond with her surreptitiously—but at length Mrs Shawe intercepted their letters and managed to persuade Thackeray that Isabella considered their engagement at an end.

My love for you is greater than I thought [he thereupon wrote to her], for it has withstood this terrible three days trial. I have tried to leave you, & you will hardly credit me that I felt obliged to return—for I do not believe in spite of all this heartlessness on your part that you ever can be other than my wife.<sup>26</sup>

For all her timidity and immaturity Isabella loved Thackeray profoundly—and his reproaches gave her strength to combat her mother's will. There is no information as to the means she used to win her battle. We know only that Charlotte Baynes her counterpart in Thackeray's rendering of this episode from his life in *Philip* sets herself into serious illness until at length her mother alarmed at this issue of her stratagem reluctantly abandons her opposition.<sup>27</sup>

In any event Thackeray and Isabella were married in August. The union was a risky one from the first—and there was an ominous appropriateness in Thackeray's having inadvertently selected for Isabella before their marriage a ring with a diamond



between two opals set in black enamel, "a mourning ring, not an engagement ring" as a friend pointed out<sup>30</sup> Thackeray hoped that Isabella would develop from "a thoughtless and frivolous girl" to a "wise and affectionate woman,"<sup>31</sup> that she would overcome her dependence on her mother, and become a self-reliant and serviceable helpmate. This she tried to do to the best of her ability and for a time it appeared that she would succeed.

In the early years of his marriage Thackeray was entirely happy with Isabella. Domesticity was in itself a delightful novelty to him and he wrote, as he became more intimately acquainted with his wife, that he had never known "a purer mind or a better temper, or a warmer heart."<sup>32</sup> In 1837 the couple removed to London and settled in an unpretentious house in Bloomsbury. Isabella occupied herself with the two children that were born to them during 1837 and 1838 while Thackeray continued to be the most uxorious of husbands. During their first prolonged separation in March of the latter year he wrote to her:

We talked all night of my dearest wife, till I longed to be home and with her. It is almost a blessing that I came away for I see now more strongly than ever how much I love her, and how my whole heart & bowels go with her. Here have we been nearly 2 years married & not a single unhappy day.<sup>33</sup>

But Thackeray's life was not entirely a domestic idyll. He had his fortune to make. The *Constitutional* failed not long after he settled in London, and he found himself, in Carlyle's phrase, "writing for his life,"<sup>34</sup> supporting his family on what he could earn from magazine articles and stories. Not that he was any longer troubled by uncertainty about the future. Full of zest for life, he had grown almost arrogant in the ardor with which he pursued success. He took to the rough-and-tumble of Grub Street in the eighteen-thirties as if he had been groomed for it all his life. "This London is a grand place for scheming," he wrote, "and rare fun for a man with broad shoulders who can push through the crowd."<sup>35</sup>

The character of Thackeray's writing during this period may best be illustrated from the most elaborate of his Yellowplush narratives, "Mr Deuceace at Paris." In this grim story of rancorous family hatreds Thackeray tells how the Hon. Frederick Deuceace, who may be observed cheating his way to a small fortune in earlier Yellowplush papers, gets his come-uppance. Deuceace knows that the widowed Lady Griffin and her step-daughter Matilda possess the great Griffin inheritance between

them, but it is not clear to him which has the bulk of the money. He pays his court to both, hoping to be enlightened on this vital point before he has to declare himself. Meanwhile his father the Earl of Crabs, a much smoother and deeper rascal than himself, has also entered the lists. Awakening Lady Griffin to his son's motives, he joins forces with her to involve Deuceace first in a duel in which he loses a hand, and then in a union with Matilda, who by marrying without her step-mother's consent forfeits her claim to the Griffin fortune. Crabs and Lady Griffin also wed, and Thackeray's footman narrator ends his story with the following tableau:

About three months after, when the season was beginning at Paris, and the autumn leaves were on the ground, my lord, my lady, me and Mortimer were taking a stroll in the Bosquet de la Reine, the carriage driving on slowly a head, and us as happy as possible, admiring the pleasant woods and the golden sunset.

My lord was expatiating to my lady upon the exquisite beauty of the scene, and pouring forth a host of trifling and virtuous sentiments suitable to the hour. It was difficult to hear him. Ah! said he, black must be the heart, my love, which does not feel the influence of a scene like this; gathering as it were from those sunlit skies, a portion of their celestial gold, and gaining somewhat of heaven with each pure draught of this delicious air!

Lady Crabs did not speak, but pressed his arm and looked upwards. Mortimer and I, too, felt some of the influences of the scene, and lent on our gilded sticks in silence. The carriage drew up close to us, and my lord and my lady sauntered slowly towards it.

Just at the place was a bench, and on the bench sat a poorly dressed woman, and by her leaning against a tree was a man whom I thought I had seen before. He was dressed in a shabby blue coat with white seams and copper buttons, a torn hat was on his head, and great quantities of matted hair and whiskers disfigured his countenance. He was not shaved, and as pale as a stone.

My lord and lady did not take the slightest notice of him, but passed on to the carriage. He and Mortimer likewise took our places. As we passed, the man had got a grip of the woman's shoulder, who was holding down her head, sobbing bitterly.

No sooner were my lord and lady seated than they both, with lightning dexterity and good nature, burst into a roar of laughter, peal upon peal, whooping and screeching, enough to frighten the evening silents.

DEUCEACE turned round. I see his face now—the face of a devil of hell! First, he looked towards the carriage and pointed to it with his maimed arm, then he raised the other and struck the woman by his side. She fell screaming.

The reader of Mr Deuceace at Paris, as of Thackeray's early fiction generally, is particularly impressed by the sort of characters with whom it deals and Thackeray's attitude towards these characters. He finds himself in a world like that of Ben Jonson's comedies, where everyone is either a rogue or a dupe. It is true that as a young man Thackeray had much experience of the seamy side of life, yet he knew its hopeful and sunny aspects too. How then is his preoccupation with sordid subjects to be explained? And why did he regard the rooks and pigeons that make up his cast of characters with such implacable hostility?

No doubt they belonged to that unfriendly outer world in which he had himself been robbed and spurned , but one wonders that did he not see how his pitilessness led him into exaggeration and overcoloring

In his early work Thackeray seems to have felt it incumbent on him to conceal the kinder side of his character, to show only its harsh and cynical aspect Tired of the misrepresentations of contemporary fiction, he tried in his own stories to give a stronger and truer picture of life , but he made the mistake of equating strength and truth with callousness and brutality Thus it is only as melodrama that the passage which I have cited may be regarded as successful, for in it Thackeray has been content to make his effects through the most obvious contrasts and ironies the Earl of Crabs mouthing sentimental platitudes one moment, bursting into diabolical laughter the next , Deuceace calling attention at once to his mutilation and his unwanted wife, while his conquerors drive off triumphant The strokes are broad and crude, the characters coarsely drawn , and the reader accordingly remains unmoved

#### IV

In March of 1839 the Thackerays' second daughter died at the age of nine months Profoundly depressed by her loss, Isabella grew more and more despondent over her deficiencies as a wife and a mother These were considerable, for she had come to Thackeray entirely untrained in the management of a household , nor did she have the pertinacity to acquire the domestic skills that she needed Moreover, Thackeray had a hundred interests which Isabella could not share She was a loyal, warm-hearted, unaffected young lady, whose letters show a pleasant talent for easy gossip But she had been given little education except in "elegant accomplishments", and she could not share her husband's absorption in literature, art, and the affairs of the outside world She was in fact a child-wife , and though Thackeray's affection for her did not diminish, he came to treat her very much as David does Dora in the later chapters of *David Copperfield*

As Thackeray grew better known in London, as his circle of friends increased, he inevitably spent less and less time at home Isabella did not resent his neglect Granting that her husband's "time is so precious,"<sup>37</sup> she allowed herself only an occasional wistful complaint to her mother-in-law From time to time Thackeray, resolving to change his ways, would announce proudly

that he was growing quite a domestic character <sup>33</sup> But he did not adhere to his resolution for at home his wife would constantly break in on his work with the prettiest excuses in the world <sup>34</sup> and his best material came to him as he rubbed shoulders with friends and acquaintances Without my favorite talk about pictures or books he confessed I am good for nothing <sup>40</sup>

In the spring of 1840 as the time approached when her third child was to be born Isabella was left much alone She dreaded this event and as she waited she worked herself into a state of despondency by brooding over her inadequacies as a wife Yet towards the end of May she was delivered without difficulty of a third daughter and her convalescence seemed to give no cause for anxiety

In July Thackeray's first book *The Paris Sketch Book* was received with flattering reviews Thinking that this was the tide which taken at the flood leads on to fortune Thackeray allowed himself to become so absorbed in his work that he failed to notice Isabella's persistent low spirits and occasional incoherences It was proposed to him early in August that he go to Antwerp to write a series of travel articles entitled *Titmarsh in Belgium* for *Blackwood's Magazine* <sup>41</sup> a periodical with which he had long been endeavoring to establish a connection Frightened by the eagerness with which Thackeray pursued a success which promised to separate him from her still further Isabella pleaded with him not to leave her He departed nonetheless but he was later to recall that she began to laugh as he went away

Returning to London two weeks later Thackeray found his wife in an extraordinary state of languor and depression <sup>42</sup> Still anxious to achieve the success that seemed almost within his grasp he contented himself at first with taking her to Margate where she could profit by the sea air while he continued his writing But Isabella showed no improvement nor can I get much work done Thackeray noted with the pitiful looks always fixed on me <sup>43</sup> In the hope that familiar faces would restore Isabella to her normal condition he then booked steamer passage for Cork where her mother and sister were living On the voyage he related to his mother

the poor thing flung herself into the water & was twenty minutes floating in the sea, before the ship's boat even saw her This it was that told me her condition. I see now she had been ill for weeks before and yet I was obstinately blind to her state

She made further attempts at suicide the next night. The weeks that followed in Cork did Isabella no good and were a period of bitter trial to Thackeray. Mrs. Shawe refused to aid him in taking care of Isabella and overwhelmed him with wrong-headed reproaches. The scar that her taunts left on his mind stands clearly revealed in those chapters of *The Newcomes* in which the Colonel's spirit is broken by the brutal jeers of the 'Campaigner'. Thackeray himself had known

in a mean room, in a mean alley of a foreign town—a low furious woman standing over him and stabbing the kind defenceless breast with killing insult and daily outrage.<sup>45</sup>

The futility of remaining in Cork soon became evident, and in October Thackeray took his wife and children to Paris, where his mother gave them the home that his mother-in-law had refused to provide. Indeed such was Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth's self-forgetful kindness during this period of trouble, that her son for a time regarded her once again with all the adoring trust of boyhood. "In these latter days," he wrote early in 1841, "I have learned to love and admire her more cordially than anything else I know of. . . . this woman, who lies awake all night thinking for us and loving us all."<sup>46</sup> During the next year he tried to find some course of treatment that would restore Isabella to sanity, but doctors in France, England, and Germany proved alike unavailing. He had forgotten ambition. If at first he could not help asking himself, "O Titmarsh Titmarsh why did you marry?"<sup>47</sup> if he could not help reminding himself that "But for these sad events I was a made man,"<sup>48</sup> now he said "Only let her get well and I shall be the happiest man in the world."<sup>49</sup> His wish was not to be granted. Isabella's mama ceased to be violent, and after a time she overcame her tendency to apathy and melancholy. But she achieved this partial recovery by abandoning her struggle to understand a world too complicated for her, by slipping back into the mental state of a little child. She remained in that condition until her death, more than half a century later.

The heart-sick despair of the months of wretchedness through which Thackeray passed in the fall and winter of 1840-41 profoundly altered his cast of mind. He learned much from suffering. He could now stand apart from himself, observing his own feelings and piercing to their motives, as he never had in the past. He writes in a prayer set down in his diary in July, 1841

Oh Lord God—there is not one of the sorrows or disappointments of my life that as I fancy I cannot trace to some error crime or weakness of my disposition. O give me your help strenuously to work out the vices of character which have born such bitter fruits already.<sup>20</sup>

Thackeray's new self knowledge brought with it a new understanding and tolerance of others. It was thus that the ground work was laid for the sad penetrating vision that distinguishes his great novels.

Despite their catastrophic conclusion his years of marriage remained his central experience. Looking back at them from the perspective of middle age he found in their disaster grief and immense joys and consolations.<sup>21</sup> The pivotal episode of his history. Through them he escaped the anathema in which Conrad sums up the theme of *Victory*—woo to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope to love—and to put its trust in life.<sup>22</sup> Henceforth what he desired most was to be the one thing that he could never have—a happy marriage. Thus the dichotomy of world and home ingrained in him by childhood experience was reinforced by his own essay in domesticity. More than ever the standards of the hearth became ultimates to him.

Thackeray's only considerable story of 1841 *The Great Hoggarty Diamond* testifies to the fashion in which his talent was shaped by what he had gone through. This is a tale of rogues and dupes no less than *Mr Deuceace at Paris*. But in it the arrogance and high spirits of the earlier story have disappeared. No longer merciless and intolerant Thackeray writes as a fellow sinner more in sorrow than in anger. His chief scoundrel the swindling promoter Brough is not a monster of calculating malignity like Lady Griffin or the Earl of Crabs but a complex creation moved by good as well as bad impulses self-deluded as well as deceiving. Almost for the first time in Thackeray's fiction, moreover the reader encounters good and amiable people who are not introduced merely to be trampled upon by selfish and evil characters.

*The Great Hoggarty Diamond* is a moral apologue illustrating the fallacy of the conventional assumption that worldly prosperity is the chief good in life. While Sam Titmarsh has the diamond pin given him by his aunt all his affairs seem to prosper. But his success is built on sand, and in the end it crumbles away. Having sold his pin Sam discovers that his apparent failure is a matter of small importance since the personal relations on which his happiness really rests have survived his débâcle. He is better off than in the days of his prosperity when ambition led

him to neglect his wife. The story is thus a veiled reflection on Thackeray's recent experience, a testimony to his tardy realization that "Where your heart is there is your treasure."

# V

But the mood in which Thackeray wrote *The Great Hogarty Diamond* did not prove lasting. He had conceived that story, as he later noted, "at a time of great affliction, when my heart was very soft and humble."<sup>53</sup> As he began to fit together the broken pieces of his life and returned to steady employment as a working journalist, his guard went up once more. His life in the years after 1841 made it inevitable that he should sink the man of sentiment in the wit and cynic.

He had many causes for dissatisfaction. With no permanent home, separated from both wife and children, he fell into a life of Bohemian bachelorhood, living in lodgings and finding his amusement in taverns, clubs, or the homes of his friends. It was a hectic, rootless existence, which he was by no means self-sufficient enough to enjoy. Nor was he altogether at ease with the artists and writers whose company he chiefly frequented. The advantages and disadvantages of their society are suggested in Mrs. Carlyle's description of a party for Mrs. Macready at which Thackeray was present late in 1843:

I question if there was as much witty speech uttered in all the aristocratic, conventional drawing rooms thro' London that night as among us little knot of blackguardist literary people who felt themselves above all rules and independent of the universe."<sup>54</sup>

Most of the guests no doubt found their associates' bonhomie a sufficient compensation for the sense of being outsiders which Mrs. Carlyle emphasizes, but Thackeray never entirely forgot that in such society he was after all a *déclassé*. Moreover, though he prospered as a periodical writer, he had to watch inferior men scoring more solid successes. In 1845 he summed up his literary position in the words, "I can suit the magazines (but I can't hit the public, be hanged to them)."<sup>55</sup> He was experiencing to the full what Arnold was later to describe as that "saturnalia of ignoble personal passions, of which the struggle for literary success, in old and crowded communities, offers so sad a spectacle."<sup>56</sup>

Against such a background, one understands why it was that Thackeray's writings in the five years before *Vanity Fair* are

only occasionally marked by the tenderness that characterizes *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*. He has himself best described the style that he developed in the words "a certain agreeable jocosely sneering good humoured scandalous sentimental sort of writing"<sup>37</sup>. He was always on the lookout for traits of snobbery, meanness and humbug that justified his discontent with life and allowed him to give vent to his pent up bitterness. But he took no credit for his censoriousness, realizing clearly what mixed motives lay behind it. "I don't believe Titmarsh has a bit higher opinion of himself," he said in 1847, "than he has of the rest of the world," nor does he much conceal his opinion of the one or the other.<sup>38</sup> So negative an attitude towards life and art provided small incentive to high accomplishment. He preferred to avoid the deeper levels of personality touched upon briefly in *The Great Hoggarty Diamond* and to confine himself to satirical reviews, travel narratives, short stories and comic sketches—as he called them—that is *jeux d'esprit* of all kinds.

Only once during this period did Thackeray give full expression to his state of mind in a novel. This was in *Barry Lyndon*, a story received with indifference or hostility by its first readers and later regarded with dislike by Thackeray himself.<sup>39</sup> Thackeray's theme in this book is essentially that of *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*, the relation between success and happiness.<sup>40</sup> Once more he used a story of rogues and dupes to investigate luck (or worldly prosperity) and the qualities necessary to its achievement. He asked the questions: does poetical justice exist outside the pages of fiction? are the virtuous likely to be successful? are the successful likely to be happy? He sought his answers in the test case of an utter scoundrel, a man at once vain, selfish, licentious and brutal. And to explore his subject with entire thoroughness he made his hero relate his own life story.

One can hardly conceive a bolder expedient. The self-exposure of a heel—as we call *Barry Lyndon*—a kind today, can be brilliantly managed in a short narrative. Witness the accomplishments of Ring Lardner and John O'Hara. But to protract such an exercise over three hundred pages multiplies difficulties. After the effect of novelty wears off, author and reader alike grow oppressed by the vicious company they are condemned to keep and by the atmosphere of moral squalor they must continue to breathe. As the narrative progresses it becomes increasingly hard to maintain both consistency of characterization and variety of interest.



Thackeray did what he could to meet this challenge by making Barry a prodigy of callous naïveté. When Barry urges, as he does many times, that all his troubles are caused by his "too easy, generous, and careless nature,"<sup>61</sup> he is not a conscious hypocrite, not another Richard the Third, protesting "I am too childish-foolish for this world." Nor is he a grandiose tragic villain, whose moral criteria are inverted, who has said to himself, like Milton's Satan, "Evil, be thou my good." Instead, he is a kind of moral idiot,<sup>62</sup> who constantly gives himself away because of his entire insensitivity to what is ordinarily regarded as right and wrong. Thackeray maintains interest in Barry throughout the novel by leading him into ever more damaging ramifications of self-exposure and by displaying the perverted ingenuity with which he attempts to plead a case that is lost from the beginning because of his inability to comprehend the code by which he is being tried.

As the novel took its course through *Fraser's Magazine*, readers interpreted Thackeray's objectivity as evidence of scorn for normal human susceptibilities and complained that his story was profoundly immoral.<sup>63</sup> At a loss to dispel so stupid a misconception by other means, Thackeray occasionally intervened in his remaining instalments to formulate explicitly the meaning of his novel.<sup>64</sup> In the interests of poetic justice, he wrote, it had been customary in fiction to reward virtue with success:

Does human life exhibit justice after this fashion? [he continued] Is it the good always who ride in gold coaches, and the wicked who go to the workhouse? Is a humbug never preferred before a capable man? Does the world always reward merit, never worship cant, never raise mediocrity to distinction? never crowd to hear a donkey braying from a pulpit nor ever buy the tenth edition of a fool's book?<sup>65</sup>

To insist on the "sham moral" of poetic justice is to make "sham characters" inevitable. The fault lies in the vulgarity of the commonly held ethical standard which recognizes no higher felicity in life than "bodily prosperity."<sup>66</sup>

Readers who protested at Barry Lyndon's "luck," who complained because so great a rascal enjoys a long career of prosperity, had missed Thackeray's point. Barry's good fortune does not bring him happiness. He has no sense of fulfilment because of his failure in the life of personal relations, where the real rewards of virtuous conduct are found. Thackeray makes this clear many times in his novel, but never more eloquently than in Barry's reflections upon returning in middle life to the scenes of his childhood.

I believe a man forgets nothing. I've seen a flower or heard some trivial word or two which have awakened recollections that somehow had lain dormant for scores of years; and when I entered the house in Clarges Street where I was born (it was used as a gambling house when I first visited London) all of a sudden the memory of my childhood came back to me—of my actual infancy; I recollected my father in green and gold, holding me up to look at a gilt coach which stood at the door and my mother in a flowered sack, with patches on her face. Some day I wonder will everything we have seen and thought and done come and flash across our minds in this way. I had rather not.<sup>61</sup>

*The Luck of Barry Lyndon* is a rebellious book that every where reveals Thackeray's dissatisfaction with the standards of the society in which he lived. It is likewise a bitter book that every where reveals Thackeray's dissatisfaction with himself. It is an exercise in prolonged self-immolation for Thackeray created Barry by probing the possibilities of evil revealed to him by his own conscience.<sup>62</sup> Nor did he much attempt to provide a foil to the depravity of Barry in the simplicity and innocence of other characters for in the middle eighteen forties Thackeray's faith in the possibilities of human nature was wavering and uncertain.<sup>63</sup>

Despite the brilliance, the consistency of tone and the freedom from sentimentalism that mark *Barry Lyndon* few readers rank it with *P Vanity Fair* and *Esmond* or even with *Pendennis* and *The Newcomes*. It carried Thackeray as far along the path of relatively impersonal realism as he was destined to go. By the time that he finished it his equipment as a novelist was complete. He had seen the world in half a dozen different roles. He had become closely acquainted with many social groups. He had intimate knowledge of most of the experiences that ordinary life has to offer. His sensitive retentive mind was stored with impressions which ten years of professional writing enabled him to communicate easily and vividly. But he had not yet found the formula that would enable him to bring these treasures of observation and feeling into focus and give them full expression. With *Vanity Fair* he discovered this formula and his discovery enabled him to write his greatest book.

CHAPTER THREE  
VANITY FAIR

I

Since I have elsewhere traced in detail the process by which Thackeray became persuaded of the inadequacy of the detached attitude towards life that informs *Barry Lyndon*<sup>1</sup> I shall content myself here with the barest summary of this crucial change in his outlook. After Thackeray re-established his home in London during the summer of 1846, the constant society of his small daughters gave him preoccupations quite different from those of his bachelor life earlier in the eighteen-forties. It was essential, he came to feel, that the novelist be himself sympathetically involved in the material of his fiction, and that he judge as well as describe his characters. Accounting for the growing sobriety of his *Punch* contributions, he told the magazine's editor, Mark Lemon

A few years ago I should have sneered at the idea of setting up as a teacher at all, and perhaps at this pompous and pious way of talking about a few papers of jokes in *Punch*—but I have got to believe in the business, and in many other things since then. And our profession seems to me to be as serious as the Parson's own.<sup>2</sup>

Late in 1846 Thackeray returned to a fragmentary novel which he had begun nearly two years before. *Pen and Pencil Sketches of English Society*, as the story was then called, had been written in the aloof, objective manner of *Barry Lyndon*. Thackeray renamed the story *Vanity Fair* and proceeded to rework his earlier text to bring it into harmony with his new principles. The result was a remarkable liberation of creative energy. He was at last able to give all aspects of his talent free play. The field of experience on which he felt able to draw was immensely widened, his capacity for ordering this experience was greatly enhanced.

The broadening and deepening of Thackeray's powers can best be illustrated by examining the relation between three prominent figures in *Vanity Fair* and their background in

Thackeray's life. A study of these test cases will show how Thackeray's personal loyalties shaped the moral convictions about which *Vanity Fair* is organized. It will reveal as well that his sympathetic emotional involvement with certain of his characters though in some respects a dangerous and distorting practice was an integral factor in his new found ability to penetrate to the profounder levels of personality.

## II

We may begin with Amelia Sedley whose original we already know. In portraying Amelia Thackeray drew on his recollections of Isabella Shawe during his years of courtship and marriage. Upon completing *Vanity Fair* Thackeray told Mrs. Brookfield that she and Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth had also counted for something in the creation of Amelia<sup>3</sup> but he retracted this statement in another letter to her written three months later.

After all, he then remarked. I see on reading over my books that the woman I have been perpetually describing is not you nor my mother but that poor little wife of mine who now does not care 2d for anything but her dinner and her glass of porter.<sup>4</sup>

Amelia is presented as a small shy defenceless girl who makes her appeal primarily to the protective instinct of the men who admire her. She has the pure mind the even temper the warm heart that Thackeray had found in Isabella.<sup>5</sup> but she also shares the deficiencies of Thackeray's wife. Her mental horizon is narrowly limited she has hardly any interests outside her family and friends. Her amusements are to play and sing at her piano and to gossip. Immersed in the small concerns of domestic life she is equally unable to take the place in society that George Osborne expects her to occupy and to share the intellectual interests of Dobbin. On most subjects she feels rather than thinks. She is easily stirred emotionally—almost any disappointment reduces her to tears—and she is a confirmed self-deceiver never able to see people as they are always allowing her picture of them to be blurred by her feelings. In sum she is simple weak and ill-equipped for the battle of life.

Now everyone would admit that there are many such women no one would deny that Thackeray's insight into the type is comprehensive and profound, omitting none of the essential traits of the kind, fresh smiling artless tender little domestic goddess whom men are inclined to worship.<sup>6</sup> Amelia is a

complete person, all of whose thoughts and actions are described without suppression or distortion. It was Thackeray's new conception of the novelist's responsibility that enabled him to achieve this portrait. It was this same conception, however, that occasioned the great difficulty that every reader of *Vanity Fair* feels in accepting Thackeray's picture of Amelia, the nature of his commentary about her.

Throughout nine-tenths of his novel Thackeray is himself the blindest worshipper of this domestic goddess. Does Amelia show herself to be empty, silly, and vain? Thackeray asserts that these are the very attributes which he prizes in women. Does she display shallowness and ignorance? Thackeray exults in these deficiencies, holding that women should properly keep aloof from the weightier issues of life. The reader thinks of Fielding's heroine after whom Thackeray christened Amelia—of the self-reliance, the sturdiness, the *scrupulousness*, in a word, that she combines with the softer qualities that make her namesake in *Vanity Fair* attractive—and wonders at Thackeray's seeming perverseness.

Knowing from whom Thackeray drew Amelia, we have the key to this discrepancy between text and commentary. Thackeray shows towards the heroine of his novel the same cherishing and tender affection that he had felt for her original in his own life. Hence the fond and indulgent language that he uses about her. On her first appearance she is presented as "one of the best and dearest creatures that ever lived."<sup>7</sup> When she offers to kiss her brother, who has brought her a nosegay, Thackeray observes, "I think for a kiss from such a dear creature as Amelia, I would purchase all Mr. Lee's conservatories out of hand."<sup>8</sup> An account of her neglect by George Osborne is followed by a passage of pitying commentary. "Poor little tender heart!" Thackeray begins, "and so it goes on hoping and beating, and longing and trusting."<sup>9</sup> When Amelia's destiny is about to be decided by the Waterloo campaign, Thackeray cannot forbear to inquire "is it not hard that the fateful rush of the great Imperial struggle can't take place without affecting a poor little harmless girl of eighteen, who is occupied in billing and cooing, or working muslin collars in Russell Square? You, too, kindly, homely flower!"<sup>10</sup>

Inevitably Thackeray drew directly in some passages of Amelia's history upon episodes of his tragic experience with Isabella. His conduct on these occasions sometimes seemed to him in retrospect inadequate and imperceptive. Not surprisingly

his fictional reproduction of them is overstrained and excessive knowing what Thackeray had been through one wonders chiefly at the relative sureness of his control. One thinks of Newman's words in his *Apologia pro Vita Sua* before he begins to rehearse the critical events of his Anglican history—as to that calm contemplation of the past in itself so desirable who can afford to be leisurely and deliberate while he practises on himself a cruel operation the ripping up of old griefs and the venturing again upon the *infandum dolorem* of years in which the stars of this lower heaven were one by one going out! <sup>11</sup>

Two examples must suffice of Thackeray's transposition of episodes from his intimate experience to fiction. In describing George Osborne's neglect of Amelia after their marriage and the pain and distress that his disregard causes her Thackeray was mindful of his own negligence towards Isabella and the degree to which it was responsible for the sad termination of his married life. One accordingly notes in his account of Amelia's sufferings and George's occasional fits of remorse a shrillness almost a hysteria quite foreign to Thackeray's usual manner. Consider first a passage in which Thackeray tells of Amelia's visit to her parents' home not long after her marriage but at a time when she had already been made aware of the careless indifference with which her husband was for the most part to treat her

She looked at the little white bed which had been hers a few days before, and thought she would like to sleep in it that night, and wake as formerly with her mother smiling over her in the morning. Dear little white bed! how many a long night had she wept on its pillow! How she had despaired and hoped to die there; and now were not all her wishes accomplished, and the love of whom she had despaired her own for ever? She went and knelt down by the bedside; and there this wounded and timorous, but gentle and loving soul, sought for consolation, where as yet, it must be owned, our little girl had but seldom looked for it. Love had been her faith hitherto and the sad, bleeding, disappointed heart began to feel the want of another consoler <sup>1</sup>

This is Amelia's (and Isabella's) side of the picture. Elsewhere we are given George Osborne's which is Thackeray's to a certain extent as well. George has returned to Amelia early in the morning after the Duchess of Richmond's ball

By the pale night-lamp he could see her sweet, pale face—the purple eyelids were fringed and closed, and one round arm, smooth and white, lay outside of the coverlet. Good God! how pure she was; how gentle how tender and how friendless! and he, how selfish, brutal, and black with crime! Heart-stained, and shame-stricken, he stood at the bed's foot, and looked at the sleeping girl. How dared he—who was he, to pray for one so spotless! God bless her! God bless her! He came to the bedside, and looked at the hand, the little soft hand, lying asleep; and he bent over the pillow noiselessly towards the gentle pale face

Two fair arms closed tenderly round his neck as he stooped down 'I am awake, George,' the poor child said, with a sob fit to break the little heart that nestled so closely by his own <sup>13</sup>

In the ensuing chapters of *Vanity Fair*, where Amelia's sanity seems threatened for a time by the trials that she undergoes, Thackeray drew on his memories of Isabella in August and September, 1840 Dobbin's impressions of Amelia at the time of George's departure for Waterloo may be referred quite specifically to Thackeray's recollections, sharpened and clarified by what afterwards occurred, of Isabella's hysterical despondency at the prospect of being separated from him, when he left for his short tour of Belgium just before her malady declared itself

Dobbin got sight of Amelia's face once more But what a face it was! So white, so wild and despair stricken, that the remembrance of it haunted him afterwards like a crime, and the sight smote him with inexpressible pangs of longing and pity

She was wrapped in a white morning dress, her hair falling on her shoulders, and her large eyes fixed and without light By way of helping on the preparations for the departure, and showing that she too could be useful at a moment so critical, this poor soul had taken up a sash of George's from the drawers whereon it lay, and followed him to and fro with the sash in her hand, looking on mutely as his packing proceeded She came out and stood, leaning at the wall, holding this sash against her bosom, from which the heavy net of crimson dropped like a large stain of blood Our gentle hearted captain felt a guilty shock as he looked at her 'Good God' thought he, 'and is it grief like this I dared to pry into?' And there was no help no means to soothe and comfort this helpless, speechless misery He stood for a moment and looked at her, powerless and torn with pity, as a parent regards an infant in pain <sup>14</sup>

It seems for a time as if the shock of George's departure will be enough in itself to unsettle Amelia's mind Even Becky is subdued by the state in which she finds her friend

'Are you come to fetch him from me?' she [Amelia] continued in a wilder tone 'He was here, but is gone now There on that very sofa he sat Don't touch it We sat and talked there I was on his knee, and my arms were round his neck, and we said, "Our Father" Yes, he was here and they came and took him away, but he promised me to come back'

'He will come back, my dear,' said Rebecca, touched in spite of herself

'Look,' said Amelia, 'this is his sash—isn't it a pretty colour?' and she took up the fringe and kissed it She had tied it round her waist at some part of the day She had forgotten her anger, her jealousy, and the very presence of her rival seemingly For she walked silently and almost with a smile on her face, towards the bed, and began to smooth down George's pillow

Rebecca walked, too, silently away 'How is Amelia?' asked Jos, who still held his position in the chair

'There should be somebody with her,' said Rebecca 'I think she is very unwell' and she went away with a very grave face <sup>15</sup>

During many months Amelia's recovery is in doubt, but Thackeray is kinder to her than destiny was to Isabella, and she is permitted to retain her sanity

Henceforth perhaps he does not identify Amelia with Isabella so closely as in the earlier part of his novel. But it is only as *Vanity Fair* draws to a close that Thackeray's attitude towards his heroine changes substantially. He originally intended to show her redeemed by her trials from the faults that he had excused but not concealed.

Dobbin and poor Briggs are the only 2 people with real humility as yet [he wrote after the first third of the novel was completed.] Amelia is to come when her scoundrel of a husband is well dead with a ball in his odious bowels when she has had sufferings a child, and a religion.<sup>1</sup>

But this intended rehabilitation did not take place. In the final double number of *Vanity Fair* Thackeray regards Amelia with none of the forbearance that he had hitherto displayed towards her. Perhaps the mature woman in her middle thirties who rejects Dobbin on his return from India no longer brought Isabella to Thackeray's mind.<sup>17</sup> In any event he does not defend Amelia when Dobbin exacerbated by long ill usage turns on her at last.

No you are not worthy of the love which I have devoted to you [Dobbin tells her]. I knew all along that the prize I had set my life on was not worth the winning—that I was a fool, with fond fancies too bartering away my all of truth and ardour against your little feeble remnant of love. I will bargain no more: I withdraw. I find no fault with you. You are very good-natured and have done your best—but you couldn't—you couldn't reach up to the height of the attachment which I bore you, and which a loftier soul than yours might have been proud to share.<sup>1</sup>

Thackeray offers no mitigation of his searching and severe analysis—and the reader is left with the impression that like Dobbin he has weighed Amelia and found her wanting. It is true that he marries her to Dobbin,<sup>18</sup> but this development is hardly presented as Dobbin's crowning felicity. If I had made Amelia a higher order of woman Thackeray explained to Robert Bell there would have been no vanity in Dobbin's falling in love with her whereas the impression at present is that he is a fool for his pains that he has married a silly little thing and in fact has found out his error rather a sweet and tender one however *quia nullum amavit*.<sup>20</sup> Thus Amelia too is made to illustrate the theme of Thackeray's book. Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or having it is satisfied?<sup>21</sup>

#### IV

Apart from these final chapters of *Vanity Fair* however every reader of the novel is conscious of the discrepancy between



what Amelia says and does and the opinion that Thackeray entertains of her. We have seen how this incongruity had its origin in the emotional allegiance that Thackeray felt towards Amelia because of his identification of her with his wife. The question remains whether it seriously impairs her success as a character. From the first Thackeray's favoritism irritated readers into protest. Miss Rigby wrote contemptuously in the *Quarterly Review* of "the little dolt Amelia," all of whose "philoprogenitive idolatries do not touch us like one fond instinct of 'stupid Rawdon'."<sup>22</sup> The *Athenæum's* critic noted that "Even the heroine Amelia—with whom the writer seems to have been somewhat enamoured (a feeling of which he is likely to have the monopoly)—is thoroughly selfish as well as silly."<sup>23</sup> And the *Spectator*, reproving Thackeray for his praise of Amelia, found her conduct "rather mawkish than interesting."<sup>24</sup> But for the most part Victorian readers were gratified by Thackeray's open partisanship. It assured them, and the assurance was welcome in so mocking and misanthropic a book as they found *Vansty Fair* to be, that Thackeray (like Disraeli some years later) was after all "on the side of the angels."

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, and the Victorian heroine (of whom Amelia had come to be regarded as the great prototype and exemplar) fell into disfavor, critics friendly to Thackeray but anxious to bring his books into harmony with the new age hit on a curious theory. Assuming that so intelligent a writer must have shared their own opinions, they interpreted his praise of Amelia as ironical. So Charles Whibley assures us that "Amelia, a very Niobe of tears, is drawn with a cold contempt, and I am not certain that she is not as savage a piece of satire as Becky herself."<sup>25</sup> Similarly the writer of a centenary article on Thackeray in the *Fortnightly Review* holds that Amelia is "A satire on the conventional theory of feminine virtue which prevailed sixty years ago. She is the traditional good woman of the poets and novelists reduced to an absurdity."<sup>26</sup> More recently Miss Elizabeth Drew has advanced a somewhat different account of Thackeray's intentions with regard to Amelia, also designed to palliate his offences against modern taste.

It is impossible as we read Thackeray [she contends in a paragraph already quoted in part] not to be convinced that he had the greatest contempt for the opinion of his day as to what made a 'good woman.' We feel Thackeray himself to have envisaged very clearly the truth of the position [between Dobbin and Amelia]—indeed it is proved that he does so by Dobbin's final outburst, where he declares her to be a mere self-deceiver in her idiotic fidelity to the memory of her worthless young husband, and to be quite unworthy of the love

he has devoted to her. But this declaration comes too late and is hopelessly weakened by Thackeray having kept us in the dark throughout the book as to his real opinion and having time upon time insisted that Amelia is the perfect type of sweet selfless womanhood. This is what his age wanted to think and that is what he feels he must give them.<sup>27</sup>

These attempts at benevolent exegesis are interesting chiefly as illustrations of the ease with which critics otherwise well equipped may come a cropper because of their deficiency in historical sense. The disparity between Amelia's character and Thackeray's commentary upon it cannot be explained away though it can be accounted for. But should this discrepancy greatly trouble the modern reader? It is not as if Thackeray had allowed his partisanship to blur the lines of his portrait. He tells the truth about Amelia even when he praises her most outrageously. It is the sharp fidelity with which he reports her words and actions indeed that arouses his reader to so acute a sense of dissatisfaction with his comments upon them. Thackeray rightly claims in his preface to *Vanity Fair* that the Amelia doll has been carved and dressed with the greatest care by the artist.<sup>28</sup> His now found human sympathy enabled him to cut beneath the surface to the deeper levels of personality in drawing Amelia's portrait to proceed much further in the detailed analysis of character than he had in any of the figures of his earlier fiction. Need we be too severe in judging the occasional excesses of sentiment into which he is led? Perhaps we should do better to apply to Amelia Henry James's words concerning the most appealing of his heroines Isabel Archer: she would be an easy victim of scientific criticism if she were not intended to awaken on the reader's part an impulse more tender.<sup>29</sup>

## V

The truth that an artist's strength and weakness are inseparable that the merits of a method imply concomitant defects receives further demonstration when we turn to certain of *Vanity Fair*'s secondary characters. In a recent essay on this novel Mr V. S. Pritchett whose views I cite as representative of informed contemporary taste selects two figures for particular praise. He describes old Miss Crawley as the greatest character in the book and of Jos Sedley he inquires: What is more perfect than the career of this buffoon?<sup>30</sup> How did Thackeray come to conceive these figures? What relation do they bear to his personal history?

Miss Crawley in her essentials is Thackeray's maternal grandmother, an account of whose lively, not to say scandalous, career I have pieced together from family papers and Commonwealth Relations Office records. Nothing certain is known of the lineage of Harriet Cowper, but there is a tradition in the Thackeray family that she had some Asiatic blood. Born about 1770,<sup>31</sup> she married John Harman Becher in Calcutta in 1786 and bore him four children during the next nine years.<sup>32</sup> Throughout this period Becher was in the civil service of the East India Company. That he was highly regarded by his superiors is attested by his appointment in 1794 to the collectorship of the Twenty-Four Pargunnahs, the large and wealthy district near Calcutta later supervised by Thackeray's father.<sup>33</sup> Yet in 1797 he is described as "out of employ."<sup>34</sup> And when he drew up his will two years later, he was a broken bankrupt, stripped of his possessions and in near expectation of death. Indeed, this pathetic document includes a plea to his creditors that he may be allowed to leave a few mementos to his relations—a family Bible, odd volumes of Shakespeare, and certain plain gold rings in each of which is to be engraved the inscription "Thus from poor Jack."<sup>35</sup> Becher was buried in Calcutta in 1800.<sup>36</sup>

Nowhere in his will does Becher mention his wife. Again family tradition explains the omission. It tells us that Mrs. Becher tired of her husband and left him some time before his death. Whether her departure was the cause or result of his ruin has not transpired. Nothing is known of Mrs. Becher, in any event, until 1802, when she figures as the wife of Captain Charles Christie in the will of that officer.<sup>37</sup> We may note, however, that though Christie's duties kept him continuously in Bengal after his arrival in India in 1781, his marriage to Mrs. Becher is not entered in the Bengal *Ecclesiastical Records*. If she lived under Christie's "protection" while her husband survived, she may not have found it convenient to legalize the connection after Becher's death. At this time Anglo-Indian society took a very lenient view of marital irregularities.

Christie died in 1804, leaving his lady a small property. But life was by no means over for her. Still hardly thirty-five, she possessed considerable personal advantages. In 1806 we find record of her marriage to Captain Edward William Butler of the Bengal Artillery.<sup>38</sup> By this step she must have retrieved altogether her position in the easy-going Calcutta world. Captain Butler was an officer of means, who had behind him twenty-three years of service in India.<sup>39</sup> Nor was he in a position very forcibly

to reproach Mrs Butler for past peccadillos. Four natural children had been born to him by native mistresses and three of these children survived.<sup>40</sup>

In 1807 Captain and Mrs Butler sailed for England on furlough.<sup>41</sup> Whatever may have been the attitude of the Becher family towards her in the years that followed her desertion of her husband she received a warm welcome upon her reappearance as a respectable matron of assured fortune. When she returned to India with Captain Butler two years later she took two of her daughters by John Becher with her and the third followed within a few months.

For the next ten years Lt Colonel Butler as he shortly became held various important positions in Bengal. The Becher girls made excellent marriages in the army and the civil service but continued to be closely associated with the Butlers for the Colonel was usually attached to a command where at least one of Mrs Butler's children lived near at hand. Butler died in 1819.<sup>42</sup> Though insolvent he was luckily a participator in two insurance schemes for the families of officers and Mrs Butler with an income of nearly £500 a year found herself possessed of a comfortable independence.<sup>43</sup> For a time she lived with her daughters. Then tiring of the narrow round of back-country society the indefatigable lady now fifty years old set off alone on four or five months dreary travelling to Calcutta.<sup>44</sup> Two years later she followed her oldest daughter to England her younger children having died in the interval.

The problem of caring for Mrs Butler home to stay after nearly thirty five years in India rather puzzled her family. The breathless response of her sister in law Miss Anne Becher to her initial proposal to return home hints at their forebodings.

Tell your mother [she wrote to Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth] if she comes to England to be as near as she can we will do all we can towards contributing to her comfort if that could be done by her living with us we would do so but our house won't allow of it & says dear Granny I never could expect her to put up with all my whims.

And indeed when Mrs Butler arrived her relatives found her a most imperious crotchety and perverse lady. But they need not have feared that she would be a burden to the family. Restless as ever she did not remain long with any of them. Apart from a year or so at Larkbeare while Thackeray was a boy she kept on the move constantly living in a variety of boarding houses and hotels in England and France accompanied on her travels by a companion and a maid.<sup>45</sup>

Thackeray first came to know her intimately after he lost his fortune in 1833. She came generously to his aid with a series of loans, and while he was trying to make himself a painter in 1834 and 1835, he lived for nearly a year with her. Though they were fond of each other, he was made to feel the full force of her uncertain temper. He told his mother on one occasion "I am at this moment writhing under the stripes of her satire, and the public expression of her wrath"<sup>47</sup> Again we find him speaking of the "bad words" which "with a wonderful eloquence and ingenuity are wrung into my ears by G. M."<sup>48</sup> Yet their quarrels were soon made up, and even after Thackeray moved into his own quarters, he continued to "walk stoutly up three times a week to be scolded" by her.<sup>49</sup>

Mrs Butler remained at Paris near Mrs Carmichael-Smyth after Thackeray married and settled in London. She was visiting him in London at the time that Isabella's affliction declared itself, most unfortunately as it turned out. Expecting to be treated with distinguished consideration and unaware of the tragedy that she was witnessing, she grew angry because Isabella did not answer when spoken to. Explaining to his mother that "the poor thing did not do this from sulkiness but from sheer absence and depression,"<sup>50</sup> Thackeray added that his grandmother was after all "a sad pestering old body."<sup>51</sup>

Thackeray lived with Mrs Butler again for a time in 1841, while Isabella was undergoing treatment in Paris. He was her favorite relative, and she was most generous to him during this second period of trouble. Indeed, her generosity was later one cause of disagreement between Thackeray and his cousin Mary Graham, also Mrs Butler's grandchild, to whom she had not been by any means so liberal. There is real cordiality in Thackeray's description of her in 1841 as "a hale, handsome old lady of seventy, the very best dressed and neatest old lady in Paris."<sup>52</sup>

Her health failed in the years that followed, and when she made her last visit to Thackeray in 1847, she was very worn and tired. His daughter remembered her as "an old lady wrapped in Indian shawls [who] rarely spoke, and was almost always in her room."<sup>53</sup> But she still occasionally rallied to bully her great-grandchildren, and she still took pleasure in her three o'clock dinner. When oppressed by ill health, she devoted herself to books of devotion.<sup>54</sup> Otherwise she remained quite as worldly as she had been when a young lady in Calcutta. The fragments of her correspondence that have survived bear witness to her determined sprightliness of manner even in her late seventies.

I cite a note to Eugénie Crowe a young lady of Thackeray's acquaintance whose beauty and ingenuousness had pleased Mrs Butler

My grandson [she writes] has invited his two young friends The Reverend Lionel Delamere and Captain Frederic Delancy (*of the Blues*) to dine with us on Friday—They perfectly well remember you at Rome—Both are bachelors: both are very rich and one I think very handsome—Bees however prefers the Captain. [Bees Hamerton was Mrs. Butler's companion.]

Could you not settle this dispute—and come to us for a few days before the great ball?

Believe me your sincere

Louisa Matilda Butler

P.S. You must come I will take no denial.<sup>23</sup>

Now this note is significant not only because it underlines Mrs Butler's lively interest in society in extreme old age but also for its reference to the Reverend Lionel Delamere and for its signature Delamere figures in *Vanity Fair* as a friend of Miss Crawley's companion Briggs and though Mrs Butler's name was Harriet she has here signed herself Matilda the name that Thackeray gave to Miss Crawley in his novel It is evident that Mrs Butler knew very well that her grandson was sketching her in *Vanity Fair* and was by no means displeased by the knowledge Indeed the success of *Vanity Fair* enchanted her not least because it took Thackeray into the best society I tell G M of the Lords I meet he wrote to his mother It delights the old lady hugely <sup>24</sup> In the autumn of 1847 Mrs Butler returned to Paris where she died on the first of November Thackeray was her executor and found upon examining her estate that nearly the whole of her fortune had been dissipated <sup>25</sup>

## VI

In *Vanity Fair* Thackeray gives Miss Crawley a lurid past in France and England rather than in India and he makes her a much richer and grander person than Mrs Butler Miss Crawley has a fortune of £70 000 a balance at her banker's which would have made her beloved anywhere <sup>26</sup> in contrast to Mrs Butler's mere £500 a year Miss Crawley maintains a house in Park Lane and moves in the best society while Mrs Butler frequented chiefly the third rate company of Parisian or provincial English boarding houses But *toutes proportions gardées* Miss Crawley is just such another old worldling as Mrs Butler

Despite her advanced years she is luxurious vain and imperious living for gossip and amusement Though long past

the inflammatory age herself, she delights to hear of other people's love affairs and finds an added spice in them if they are illicit "That was the most beautiful part of dear Lord Nelson's character," she tells Becky "He went to the deuce for a woman"<sup>59</sup> It is Rawdon's reputation as a rake that makes him her favorite nephew The capitalist of her family, she expects her eccentricities and selfishness to be forgiven for the sake of her money, and regards the careful attendance provided by her relatives and companions when she is ill as merely her just due When very sick, she is frightened into spurts of piety But for the most part she is a shrewd and self-possessed old woman of the world, gauging people and their motives with precision, and knowing how to make herself respected and obeyed

Thackeray knew few women better than Mrs Butler, her character had few secrets from him He had a certain fondness for her, he regarded her foibles and eccentricities with forbearance, but he felt none of the emotional attachment to her that he did to Isabella In drawing her as Miss Crawley he accordingly makes no attempt to excuse her weaknesses, as he does those of Amelia, but portrays her with a cool detachment<sup>60</sup> Consequently, there is no disparity, as in Amelia's case, between what Miss Crawley does and what Thackeray says about her actions His valedictory to her in the October number of *Vanity Fair*<sup>61</sup> may stand as an example of the impartiality with which he habitually judges her "Peace to thee, kind and selfish, vain and generous old heathen!—We shall see thee no more"<sup>62</sup> Thackeray's portrait of Miss Crawley is thus quite perfect, as far as it goes, always consistent, always controlled, yet contrasted with his picture of Amelia, it is limited and superficial

## VII

Finally, let us consider Jos Sedley, the other character in *Vanity Fair* praised especially by Mr Pritchett His "original" can be identified with quite as much certainty as can Amelia's and Miss Crawley's

Our cue comes this time from Henry Beveridge, the father of the present Lord Beveridge Beveridge came out to India in 1858 Among the friends that he made was Merrick Shawe, Thackeray's brother-in-law, who had himself been in India since 1834 "He was informed by Mr Shawe," Beveridge later recalled, "that the character [of Jos Sedley] was an over-coloured picture of George Trant Shakespear"<sup>63</sup>

Shakespear was Thackeray's cousin. Born in India two years before Thackeray, he had preceded him home by several months. He was among Thackeray's companions in misery at the Arthurs school in Southampton. "Indeed Thackeray later told a common relative Mrs Irvine 'I can remember George coming in and flinging himself down on my bed the first night' " There a friendship between the two began which continued at Charterhouse School and was not entirely broken off until George went out to India as a writer in the East India Company's service in 1829 "6

George remained in India for fourteen years rising steadily in the service but seeing employment almost exclusively in remote provincial outposts. Nuddea Moorsbedabad Pubna Dinagore the Soonderbunds Midnapore and Hidgelee were some of the localities in which he successively served as magistrate collector and commissioner "7 It was not until early in 1843 that he was granted permission to return to England on furlough. "8

George was then thirty three years old and a very odd fish. Of rotund form and rolling gait he was known in his family as the *Polar Bear*. That this nickname pleased him is attested by a set of verses written to celebrate an occasion auspicious in Shakespear annals in which he pleasantly describes himself as a part of the brute creation, whose joy leads him to shuffle with gambols rude "9 For the rest he was a great consumer of food liquor and tobacco and a confirmed bachelor skittish as a colt with unmarried women. His family and close friends accepted him as an acknowledged eccentric and felt real fondness for him. His sister Selina meeting him for the first time in 1838 at the age of eighteen (such late encounters among near kin were a not uncommon chance of Anglo Indian life) admitted that he had been so much in the jungles that he was shy but found him witty and amusing when alone with us "10 Similarly William Ritchie four years later described him as a fat shy eccentric but most witty entertaining old fellow "11

In January 1843 George joined his sister Augusta and her husband John Low aboard the East Indiaman *India* bound for Suez. Augusta kept a journal of their experiences in which her brother figures characteristically. On the first leg of their journey he was constantly seasick and Augusta had to note regretfully that there was no good saying of his to relate "12 In Madras reviving spirits led him into a typical blunder. With Low he presented himself at the Club House but only his



brother-in-law gained admittance, since George did not belong either to the Bengal or Bombay club and could not claim exchange privileges Augusta writes

Low says poor George drove off with his servant, looking piteously at him & saying—'I am rejected' However, it appears he made himself very comfortable at a Punch House, where he played billiards at a very old table, full of holes, with a little black boy, who he says gave him ten & beat him <sup>73</sup>

Re-embarked on the *India*, George was still harried by misfortune

George has lost four caps made by Messrs Gibson & Co overboard, [Augusta notes] also the straw hat which was too small for Low, and he is now obliged to wear a strange thing on his head like a little horn <sup>74</sup>

Unceasing seasickness and a painful fall reduced him to profound depression

I saw George to day [Augusta notes with unfailing sprightliness after a spell of particularly heavy weather], he declares whenever he is put on shore, there he will remain, and never go on board another vessel He says also he will leave off cheroots and beer <sup>75</sup>

These good resolutions did not survive the temptations of port George amused himself ashore at Aden by spending "about £30 in beer and supplies" to see him through the few days that remained of the voyage He also mounted "a very short, stout little poney" to visit the fortifications that the Turks were building in expectation of Arab raids, where he was nearly shot for his pains by suspicious Turkish guards <sup>76</sup>

Arrived at length at Suez, the passengers of the *India* betook themselves to vans "like butchers' carts," except for "the addition of a chintz covering over the top" <sup>77</sup> In these conveyances they headed across the desert to Cairo One of the stations at which they spent the night was in the charge of a pretty Englishwoman from Kent, who had married an Arab

She was most civil and tripped about in a light and airy way [writes Augusta] George however was quite put out by her politeness, and said, as we drove off 'Sooner than have that pretty damsel flitting about him, he would have fled across the desert on foot' <sup>78</sup>

When the party reached Cairo, George and the Lows visited a slave market, where a number of fat and cheerful Abyssinian women were exposed for sale

On one of the women saying something [Augusta relates], they all laughed, and they told us it was because she had said she would like to be bought by that "young man"

This was George! George said her selection was "a great trial" <sup>79</sup>

He was further harassed during the boat trip from Cairo to Alexandria. The cook that he hired for the journey came aboard tipsy and later in the trip while George was ashore endeavoring unsuccessfully to shoot quail this miscreant

got at his wine and drank three bottles of sherry after which I saw him [says Augusta] sitting knocking his head against a leg of mutton, George's and mine remains of Messrs. Hill's provisions.<sup>80</sup>

George parted company from the Lows at Alexandria. He proceeded to London in a leisurely fashion arriving there in time to become a member of the Oriental Club late in 1843.<sup>81</sup> By the following June he and Thackeray had renewed their boyhood friendship though hardly on the old basis of intimacy. In that month Thackeray mentions to an aunt that he has seen George twice adding we have besides exchanged cards genteelly.<sup>82</sup> And in July Thackeray reports having had tea with George whose selfishness is delightfully characteristic.<sup>83</sup>

Three months later George died in Geneva.<sup>84</sup> It is said by his own hand.<sup>85</sup> What caused this abrupt transition from farce to melodrama in his history remains obscure. In any event though his savings from his lucrative Indian employments had been substantial enough to allow him to return to England and live in London in considerable style less than £800 was turned over to his heirs in 1846.<sup>86</sup>

## VIII

When the reader first encounters Jos Sedley in *Vanity Fair* he has just returned to England after eight years in the employment of the East India Company. The whole of this period was passed in solitude as collector of Boggley Wollah. Thackeray tells us a remote outpost situated in a fine lonely marshy jungly district.<sup>87</sup>

He was lary peevish, and a bow-crisis [Thackeray continues] the appearance of a lady frightened him beyond measure; hence it was but seldom that he joined the paternal circle in Russell Square, where there was plenty of gaiety and where the jokes of his good natured old father frightened his *amour propre*. His bulk caused Joseph much anxious thought and alarm; now and then he would make a desperate attempt to get rid of his superabundant fat; but his indolence and love of good living speedily got the better of those endeavours at reform, and he found himself again at his three meals a day. He never was well dressed; but he took the highest pains to adorn his big person, and passed many hours daily in that occupation. His valet made a fortune out of his wardrobe; his toilet-table was covered with as many pomatums and essences as ever were employed by an old beauty; he had tried, in order to give himself a waist, every girth stay and waistband then invented. Like most fat men,

he *would* have his clothes made too tight, and took care they should be of the most brilliant colours and youthful cut. When dressed at length, in the afternoon he would issue forth to take a drive with nobody in the Park, and then would come back in order to dress again and go and dine with nobody at the Piazza Coffee house. He was as vain as a girl, and perhaps his extreme shyness was one of the results of his extreme vanity.<sup>88</sup>

This sharp, merciless vignette no doubt represents George Shakespear as Thackeray saw him in their several encounters in 1844. One might think, from the evidence of Augusta Low's diary, that Thackeray had suppressed some of George's more amiable traits, his cleverness, his affection for his family, and his appreciation of the comic aspects of his own character. But perhaps Augusta's testimony was colored by a sister's partiality. Thackeray's picture of Jos may be substantially what any unbiased observer would have seen in George Shakespear. In any event, the chapters that follow develop these traits in action, and a richly comic figure emerges, in portraying whom Thackeray only once deviates from the strictest and most objective realism. It is in the final episode of Jos's career that Thackeray thus taxes his reader's faith. Jos dies at Aix-la-Chapelle, where he has for some time been living with Becky. It is discovered that his fortune has been dissipated, and that he has left behind him only an insurance policy made out equally to Becky and to Amelia. There can be no doubt that Thackeray means it to be understood that Becky has encompassed Jos's death. Witness the illustration entitled "Becky's second appearance in the character of Clytemnestra,"<sup>89</sup> in which she lurks behind a curtain, knife in hand, while the sick and terrified Jos pleads with Dobbin to come and live near him. Witness the names that Thackeray gives to the firm of solicitors who press Becky's claim to Jos's insurance: Messrs, Burke, Thurtell, and Hayes—each christened after a famous murderer.<sup>90</sup> We have seen how George Shakespear's career ended on a minor key with his suicide at Geneva. Forgetting momentarily the requirements of verisimilitude, Thackeray seems to have acted on this hint in bringing Jos Sedley violently to his long home.<sup>91</sup>

Apart from this single lapse, Thackeray's portrait of Jos is faultless. He knows the type perfectly and presents it without praise or blame. He does not excuse Jos's weaknesses, as he does Amelia's, nor does he pursue them with scorn and anger, as he does Becky's. But he can be neutral and dispassionate in contemplating Jos only because he does not take him seriously. Understanding thoroughly what goes on in Jos's head, he does not think it worth his while to enter into Jos's state of mind.

The reason is that as a rule he cares to describe the feelings of his characters in detail to penetrate to the deeper levels of their experience only when he draws them from persons with whom he had lived on terms not merely of intimacy but of close personal attachment. If Thackeray's portraits of Miss Crawley and of Jos Sedley are both very nearly flawless they are yet mere sketches when compared with his portrait of Amelia which is not flawless at all. To note these two orders of characterization is to wonder if impartiality may not be too dearly bought when it entails the sacrifice of sympathy and penetration as it usually does in Thackeray's fiction.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PENDENNIS HELEN PENDENNIS

#### I

During the course of *Vanity Fair*'s serial appearance in 1847-48 Thackeray rose from relative obscurity to celebrity. His success was fraught with important consequences for his fiction. It settled the formula to which Thackeray wrote all of his subsequent long novels except *Esmond*, *Pendennis*, *The Newcomes*, *The Virginians* and *Philip* are without exception loose, comprehensive narratives in which, during the course of "a sort of confidential talk between writer and reader,"<sup>1</sup> Thackeray traces the careers of twenty or thirty characters over two decades or more. With characteristic self-depreciation Thackeray maintained in the preface to *Pendennis* that such episodic chronicles must "fail in art constantly."<sup>2</sup> It may be admitted at any rate that, written as they were from month to month, each number completed at high speed shortly before it had to be in the printer's hands, the liveliness of these books comes and goes. Everything depended, indeed, on the alertness with which Thackeray's mind was working at the time that he wrote. If *Pendennis* largely lacks the intensity and unity of *Vanity Fair*, "all that sustained attempt to relate everything to everything else, to make it all tell in developing a central theme,"<sup>3</sup> it was at least composed while Thackeray was living a full and varied life and constantly meeting with people and ideas that he found interesting. The novel reflects this exciting atmosphere and remains in consequence very much alive today.

Thackeray's eagerness to consolidate and extend the success that he had won with *Vanity Fair* affected *Pendennis* in another way. *Vanity Fair* had won general approval, but the approval was grudging. The book's first readers were overwhelmed by the picture of depravity that it presented. "Very clever, very effective, but cruel to human nature," was Mrs. Browning's representative verdict. "A painful book, and not the pain that purifies and exalts. Partial truths after all, and those not

wholesome ' Thackeray's critics friends and correspondents united in urging him to demonstrate his essential amiability and benevolence in his next novel ' 5

Moreover internal as well as external pressures were at work. Recognition and popularity made Thackeray milder and more genial. Everyday I get more ashamed of my yellow cover and former misanthropical turn he wrote after the seventh monthly number of *Pendennis* had appeared The world is a great deal better than some satirists have painted it ' He was touched when eighty Edinburgh admirers banded together to send him a silver punch bowl

Such tokens of regard and sympathy [he wrote] are very precious to a writer like myself, who have some difficulty still in making people understand what you have been good enough to find out in Edinburgh that under the mask satirical there walks about a sentimental gentleman who means not unkindly to any mortal person.

In *Pendennis* therefore Thackeray quite consciously endeavored to soften the asperities of *Vanity Fair* to be urbane kindly and indulgent And since as Henry James was later to remark English readers adhere pertinaciously to the old stupid superstition that the amiability of a story teller is the amiability of the people he represents—that their vulgarity or depravity or gentility or fatuity are tantamount to the same qualities in the painter himself, ' 8 Thackeray had no alternative but to attempt the portrayal of good and amiable people who would embody his positive ideals He sought these characters perforce amongst those members of his intimate circle towards whom he felt a profound emotional allegiance Only within this group could he find figures whom he exempted from his generally unfavorable view of human nature who were in his eyes free from the mean ness hypocrisy and selfishness that experience had taught him to regard as usual in men and women. So it happened that in *Pendennis* Thackeray drew Mrs Brookfield with whom he had recently fallen in love as Laura Bell, and his mother as Helen Pendennis I shall center my attention on the second portrait which represents by all odds the more difficult achievement

## II

Thackeray intended Helen Pendennis to be a quite literal picture of Mrs Carmichael-Smyth. Mrs Pendennis is living with me he told Arthur Hugh Clough when he was just beginning his novel (She is my mother) ' 9 As we have seen Mrs

Carmichael-Smyth had been the central figure in Thackeray's early life,<sup>10</sup> and she and her husband were living with Thackeray in London from the autumn of 1848 until the spring of 1850, that is during the whole of the period in which *Pendennis* was written.<sup>11</sup> She read his books attentively and made her opinions known about them very freely. Circumstances were not propitious, one would think, for a candid portrayal.

Yet Mrs Carmichael-Smyth offered a subject that any novelist might have envied Thackeray. In India she had been accounted "one of the most beautiful women of her time",<sup>12</sup> and she remained "exquisitely handsome" in her English retirement, "fascinating everyone who came in her way."<sup>13</sup> "Of the commanding order of women,"<sup>14</sup> she continued to cultivate at home the "imperial manner"<sup>15</sup> that she had acquired as the wife of a great Calcutta dignitary, and was recognised as a personage wherever she went.

Nor was her character less remarkable than her appearance. The key to it, perhaps, was what her granddaughter described as "her almost romantic passion of feeling."<sup>16</sup> She was incapable of regarding any person or subject dispassionately, her sympathies always became earnestly engaged. But her affection was lavished chiefly on her only child, whom she regarded as "the divinest creature in the world."<sup>17</sup> Not without reason did Thackeray acknowledge to Dickens a fondness for Mrs Steerforth in *David Copperfield* and hint that Mrs Steerforth's relationship with her son resembled his own with Mrs Carmichael-Smyth.<sup>18</sup> Mrs Steerforth's maternal pride, her implicit faith in her son's generosity, nobility, and great capacity, and her seeming inability to speak or think about anything else will be recalled, as will the close resemblance between mother and son which made disagreement between them particularly painful. In all these points Mrs Steerforth brought his mother to Thackeray's mind. Nor did Mrs Carmichael-Smyth's love fail to elicit an answering tenderness. "If I were to die," Thackeray wrote late in life, "I can't bear to think of my mother living beyond me."<sup>19</sup>

Though by no means a *bas bleu*, Mrs Carmichael-Smyth was a woman of considerable culture and refinement. In her correspondence she adheres to something of the stateliness and formality of an earlier age, and the family archives provide other testimony to her considerable command of language in the form of an unfinished novel for children and a sheaf of poems. She had no sense of humor. "I would die," Thackeray once said, "rather than make a joke to her."<sup>20</sup> Her enthusiasm and

energy were such that she could not live without some person or cause to serve as a focus of interest in her life. She passionately advocated such forlorn hopes as hydropathy and homeopathy and she was rarely without a protégée chosen from among the lamest of lame ducks. Since she could not endure that anyone whom she loved should differ from her it was not always easy to preserve the harmony of the household.

Her most troublesome crusade was in support of Evangelical Christianity. From her Indian letters it would appear that while always pious she did not greatly concern herself with religious doctrine until her return to England. But she was of a melancholy turn of mind. Thackeray noted that he inherited from her his own tendency to glumness and remarked her favorite propensity to be miserable.<sup>21</sup> In the leisure of country retirement it was not long before she adopted with her customary fervor the gloomy creed of Evangelicalism. She became in Thackeray's words a dear old Gospel mother who is a good Christian and who always has chapter and verse to prove everything.<sup>22</sup> She forbade cards in her household as a waste of time; she insisted upon regular church attendance and the reading of improving works.

During the years of Thackeray's young manhood his mother's jealous affection tormented while it comforted him. She was perpetually anxious about the spiritual and temporal welfare of her only child. Exceedingly ambitious for him, she was correspondingly depressed by his long deferred success and Thackeray was haunted by her unexpressed disappointment. Inevitably his mother's unconscious effort to dominate his life led Thackeray to revolt. They argued over religion, the value of university training, painting as a profession and many other subjects. We differ about a thousand things, Thackeray said in maturity.

Those of a past generation can't feel with us.<sup>23</sup> And indeed as his knowledge of life increased Thackeray came to regard his mother in a very different light than he had in youth.

It gives the keenest tortures of jealousy and disappointed yearning to my dearest old mother [he told a boyhood friend in 1853] that she can't be all in all to me—mother, sister, wife, everything but it mayn't be—There's hardly a subject on wh. we don't differ. And she lives away at Paris with her husband & noble simple old gentleman who loves nothing but her in the world, and a jealousy after me tears & rends her. Eh! who is happy? When I was a boy at Larkbeare, I thought her an Angel and worshipped her. I see but a woman now. O so tender so loving so cruel.<sup>24</sup>

Her son's withdrawal of implicit trust was hard for Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth to bear. In 1855 Thackeray noted his mother's



jealousy of one of his close friends of later life, Mrs. Frederick Elhot, whom she had met for the first time

The dear old soul made me pass thirty miserable hours, and kept me awake at night and gave me a headache—What, won't this otherwise saint of a woman ever cease to strike and wound me?—It is all a sort of fury of balked fondness because I won't like her enough<sup>25</sup>

Long after Thackeray became famous, Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth's granddaughter relates, "she used to make him unhappy by her reproofs and she always treated him as if he was a little boy"<sup>26</sup>

### III

In *Pendennis* Thackeray sketches his mother both as he saw her in youth and as he saw her in maturity. These divergent views were facilitated, perhaps made inevitable, by a change in perspective that occurs during the course of the book. The first half of *Pendennis* is a *Bildungsroman*, a semi-autobiographical novel describing a young man's entry into the world. The charm of these earlier chapters, the impression of delicious maturity that Tennyson, for example, received upon reading them,<sup>27</sup> derives from Thackeray's combination of vivid, immediate realization of Pen's youthful experiences with wise and penetrating interpretation of these experiences as they appear to him from the vantage point of middle age<sup>28</sup>. This contrast of youth and maturity, this "doubleness" of vision, is lost in the later chapters of the novel, in which Pen, now established as an author, becomes simply the alter-ego of Thackeray after *Vanity Fair*.

Pen is portrayed in childhood as an only son, the sole object of his mother's adoration, the center of her world. The little scene in which he is first introduced to the reader is a direct reminiscence of Thackeray's boyhood summers at Larkbeare with Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth.

At sunset, from the lawn of Fair Oaks, there was a pretty sight—it and the opposite park of Clavering wore in the habit of putting on a rich golden tinge, which became them both wonderfully. The upper windows of the great house flamed so as to make your eyes wink; the little river ran off noisily westward, and was lost in a sombre wood, behind which the towers of the old abbey church of Clavering (whereby that town is called Clavering St. Mary's to the present day) rose up in purple splendour. Little Arthur's figure and his mother's cast long blue shadows over the grass, and he would repeat in a low voice (for a scene of great natural beauty always moved the boy, who inherited this sensibility from his mother) certain lines beginning, 'These are thy glorious works, Parent of Good, Almighty! thine this universal frame,' greatly to Mrs. Pendennis's delight. Such walks and conversation generally ended in a profusion of filial and maternal embraces, for to love and to pray were the main occupations of this dear woman's

life and I have often heard Pendennis say in his wild way that he felt that he was sure of going to heaven, for his mother never could be happy there without him.<sup>22</sup>

Pen's worship of his mother is untinged by any doubt or criticism.

During his childhood and youth Thackeray tells us the boy thought of her as little less than an angel—a supernatural being all wisdom love and beauty.<sup>20</sup>

Yet Thackeray does not conceal the dangers of uncritical mutual love between mother and son. Helen Pendennis gives Pen an absurdly exaggerated conception of his talents and importance. She is beyond reason reluctant to lose her son and that anxious hold she has had of him as long as he has remained in the mother's nest.<sup>21</sup> When her ward Laura refuses the proposal of marriage that Pen from a sense of duty rather than from love has made to her Helen is most unfairly angry with her because she sees in the marriage a way of keeping her son at home. Both in his own person and through the comments of other characters Thackeray points out how her cherishing fondness unfits Pen for the world. Major Pendennis bluntly remarks that The mother has spoiled the young rascal with her cursed sentimentality and romantic rubbish.<sup>22</sup> and Helen's neighbors freely disparage her pride and absurd infatuation about that boy.<sup>23</sup>

Despite Helen's foolishness and weakness Thackeray remains unshaken in his loyalty to her during the first half of the novel. Again and again the reader encounters unmeasured praise of women of her sort in whose angelical natures Thackeray says in a typical passage there is something awful as well as beautiful to contemplate at whose feet the wildest and fiercest of us must fall down and humble ourselves in admiration of that adorable purity which never seems to do or to think wrong.<sup>24</sup>

#### IV

Only in chapters fifty to fifty seven does the change of perspective that I have mentioned begin to operate. By this time Pen's development is substantially over. He has become in effect a projection of Thackeray himself in mature life. Consequently his current attitude towards his mother as towards other persons then of central importance to him finds immediate expression in his novel. If the secret history of books could be written he observes in this part of *Pendennis* and the author's private thoughts and meanings noted down alongside of

his story, how many insipid volumes would become interesting, and dull tales excite the reader '""<sup>35</sup> Let us examine the "private thoughts and meanings" latent in the part Helen plays in the episode of the novel that concerns Fanny Bolton

Of this episode generally I shall say very little, since I intend to discuss it in connection with Thackeray's relationship to the Brookfields in chapter six <sup>36</sup> It will suffice to recall that Fanny is a girl of the servant class with whom Pen is for a time infatuated He breaks with her, only to fall ill of a fever, and she nurses him until his mother and Laura Bell can be summoned to London When these ladies arrive, they dismiss Fanny at once, taking it for granted that she is Pen's mistress, and in the sequel Helen's jealous affection, which Laura entirely shares, leads her to suppress a letter that poor Fanny has written to Pen

When Thackeray sent these chapters to Mrs Brookfield, he remarked, "It seems to me to be a good comedy My mother would have acted in just such a way if I had run away with a naughty woman""<sup>37</sup> This was not mere surmise In 1856 Thackeray found it necessary to apologize to his friend Mrs Sartoris for the freedom with which he had spoken of the domestic misfortunes of her sister Fanny Kemble, who had long since separated from her husband Pierce Butler

I heard and saw from your own behaviour, [he wrote] how much grieved and hurt you were at what I said, and think now your offence was quite natural though I meant none when I spoke—only a burst of indignation carried me off—and that I believe, as I think of it now, was not caused by your sister so much as by some private wrongs of my own Whether rightly or wrongly, there certainly are statements in Butler's pamphlet to the effect that he was accused of being improperly fond of his children's governess My relations some 7 or 8 years ago accused me too (no didn't accuse, only insinuated) that I had cast unlawful eyes on a Governess—the story of *Jane Eyre*, seduction, surreptitious family in the Regent's Park, &c, which you may or mayn't have heard, all grew out of this confounded tradition—and as I never spoke 3 words to the lady and had no more love for my Governess than for my grandmother, and as the calumny has been the cause of a never-quite mended quarrel and of the cruellest torture and annoyance to me, whenever I hear of poor gentlemen and poor governesses accused of this easy charge, I become wild and speak more no doubt from a sense of my own wrongs than theirs"<sup>38</sup>

The information that this letter supplies is corroborated by a passage in Lady Eastlake's notorious *Quarterly Review* article on *Vanity Fair* and *Jane Eyre* published eight years earlier It is here noted that Currier Bell's dedication of the second edition of *Jane Eyre* to Thackeray had given rise to "various rumours, more or less romantic For example, *Jane Eyre* is sentimentally assumed to have proceeded from the pen of Mr Thackeray's governess, whom he had himself chosen as his model for Becky,

and who in mingled love and revengo personified him in return as Mr Rochester '39

How deeply Thackeray was hurt by this groundless scandal which attached itself to one of the series of governesses who taught his two daughters <sup>40</sup> and in particular by his mother's willingness to credit it is revealed in chapter fifty-seven of his novel. Here Pen turns on his mother and denounces her meddling interference in a scene which occupies the same place in his portrait of Helen as does Dobbin's arraignment of Amelia at the end of *Vanity Fair* in the portrait of Thackeray's earlier heroine.

It was evening before Helen and Laura came into the sitting room to join the company there. She came in leaning on Laura, with her back to the waning light, so that Arthur could not see how pallid and woo-stricken her face was, and as she went up to Pen, whom she had not seen during the day and placed her fond arms on his shoulder and kissed him tenderly. Laura left her and moved away to another part of the room. Pen remarked that his mother's voice and and her whole frame trembled, her hand was clammy cold as she put it up to his forehead, piteously embracing him. The spectacle of her misery only added somehow to the wrath and testiness of the young man. He scarcely returned the kiss which the suffering lady gave him; and the countenance with which he met the appeal of her look was hard and cruel. She persecutes me, he thought within himself, and she comes to me with the air of a martyr. 'You look very ill, my child,' she said. 'I don't like to see you look in that way. And she tottered to a sofa, still holding one of his passive hands in her thin, cold clinging fingers.

'I have had much to annoy me, mother,' Pen said, with a throbbing breast; and as he spoke Helen's heart began to beat so that she sat almost dead and speechless with terror.

Warrington, Laura, and Major Pendennis, all remained breathless aware that the storm was about to break.

'I have had letters from London,' Arthur continued, 'and one that has given me more pain than I ever had in my life. It tells me that former letters of mine have been intercepted and purloined away from me;—that—that a young creature who has shown the greatest love and care for me, has been most cruelly used by—by you, mother.'

'For God's sake stop,' cried out Warrington. 'She's ill—don't you see she's ill?'

'Let him go on,' said the widow faintly.

'Let him go on and kill her,' said Laura, rushing up to her mother's side. 'Speak on, sir, and see her die.'

'It is you who are cruel,' cried Pen, more exasperated and more savage because his own heart, naturally soft and weak, revolted indignantly at the injustice of the very suffering which was laid at his door. 'It is you that are cruel, who attribute all this pain to me; it is you who are cruel with your wicked reproaches, your wicked doubts of me, your wicked persecutions of those who love me,—yes, those who love me, and who have everything for me, and whom you despise and trample upon because they are of lower degree than you. Shall I tell you what I will do—what I am resolved to do now that I know what your conduct has been?—I will go back to this poor girl whom you turned out of my doors, and ask her to come back and share my home with me. I'll defy the pride which persecutes her and the pitiless suspicion which insults her and me.' <sup>41</sup>

But Thackeray does not end his portrait of Helen on this note of justified severity. As the scene develops Pen is reconciled to

his mother and in describing her death, which follows almost immediately, Thackeray returns to the attitude towards her that he had displayed in the earlier part of his novel "The sainted woman was dead," he writes "The last emotion of her soul here was joy, to be henceforth unchequered and eternal. The tender heart beat no more, and it was to have no more pangs, no more doubts, no more griefs and trials. Its last throb was love and Helen's last breath was a benediction."<sup>42</sup>

Thackeray drew Mrs Pendennis with the sympathetic insight that he had shown in portraying Amelia in *Vanity Fair*. What he says about her often seems overstrained, but he does not allow his fondness for her to prevent him from presenting her in the round, from showing her faults as well as her virtues. Indeed, Mrs Carmichael-Smyth was by no means pleased with his candor. Reporting that his daughter Anne had said to him, "O how like Granny is to Mrs Pendennis Papa," Thackeray remarked "Granny is mighty angry that I should think no better of her than that."<sup>43</sup>

## V

Thackeray's contemporaries were not aware of any incongruity between what Thackeray shows Mrs Pendennis to be and what he sometimes says about her. They accepted her—as they did his very similar portrait of Laura—at Thackeray's own valuation. The early reviewers of *Pendennis* were united in their admiration of both ladies. Thomas Hood sums up their response, when he inquires "What can we do but simply bow down reverently before the goodness and sweetness of Helen Pendennis, and the wisdom and womanhood of Laura?"<sup>44</sup>

By the end of the century, however, Mrs Pendennis and Laura, like Amelia, had fallen from favor, and Thackeray's unduly high estimate of them was frequently made a ground of complaint against him. This reaction has been intensified in our own time.<sup>45</sup> Miss Elizabeth Drew, for example, considers that

The whole attitude of Mrs Pendennis—an attitude not by any means confined to Victorian mothers—gave an opportunity for a magnificent satiric effect, but Thackeray is afraid of his public and prefers to praise Mrs Pendennis fulsomely for her maternal devotion, instead of satirizing her unmercifully for the form it takes.<sup>46</sup>

It will be observed that Miss Drew does not question the effectiveness of Thackeray's characterization. Admitting this, she doubts only his judgment of Helen. She wants him to take the same view of her as, let us say, Sidney Howard does of Mrs Phelps, the ghastly maternal vampire of *The Silver Cord*.

Such a demand reveals a basic incomprehension of the nature of Thackeray's art which derives in turn from an inability to consider the literature of the past except in terms of modern attitudes. Miss Drew fails to see that Thackeray is presenting a normal relationship—heightened no doubt by the extreme emotional sensitivity of the two characters involved—not a pathological case history. She does not realize that in picturing such a situation sympathy will take him nearer the truth than satire. Again Miss Drew is so determined to find evidences of a modern mind in Thackeray that when he fails to take her view of Helen she can only explain his aberration by implying that he has been guilty of a cowardly concession to Victorian prejudice. We have seen that his estimate of Helen is rather to be referred to her origin in Thackeray's personal life to the emotional ties that made inevitable his efforts to palliate her shortcomings.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PENDENNIS MAJOR PENDENNIS

#### I

Following the plan employed with *Vanity Fair*, the comparison of Thackeray's portrait of Amelia with those of Miss Crawley and Jos Sedley, I propose in this chapter to consider in relation to his "original" in Thackeray's life a character in *Pendennis* who unlike Mrs Pendennis, has claimed both Victorian and modern suffrages. This is Major Pendennis. The place he has continued to hold in the esteem of Thackeray's readers, is summed up in Charles Whibley's study of 1903, the first comprehensive account of Thackeray's work to reflect the shift from Victorian to modern taste. Whibley could hardly find words severe enough for Mrs Pendennis and Laura. "They suggest nothing save dulness and insipidity," he writes. "They are not so much women as bottles of tears, reverberating phonographs of sobs."<sup>1</sup> Major Pendennis, on the other hand, seemed to him "the most vital, as he is the most entertaining, figure in the book."<sup>2</sup>

Thackeray nowhere identifies Major Pendennis's "original," yet it may be readily demonstrated that the Major too was drawn from life. Let us first note the few details that we are given of his career anterior to the opening of *Pendennis*. Thackeray tells us that he was sent out to India in early youth as a penniless lieutenant,<sup>3</sup> that he saw much service there, some of it apparently in the capacity of a superior military magistrate (the adventurer Altamont, who had known him in India, is afraid of him and calls him "Captain Beak"),<sup>4</sup> that he rose to be "secretary to Lord Buckley, when commander-in-chief,"<sup>5</sup> that he returned to England by the Cape of Good Hope in 1806,<sup>6</sup> and that he served in the ill-fated Walcheren campaign of 1809-1810.<sup>7</sup> We learn nothing of his employments after his settlement in Regency London. But we are informed that he was freely admitted to the society "of the great George, of the Royal Dukes, of the statesmen, beauties, and fashionable ladies of the day,"<sup>8</sup> that he was favored by the Duke of Wellington,<sup>9</sup> that the Duke

of York was his particular patron and friend <sup>10</sup> and that Lord Yarmouth John Wilson Croker and Theodore Hook were his intimate associates <sup>11</sup> A bachelor living in lodgings he makes himself a power in several London clubs including one in Pall Mall where As he was one of the finest judges of wine in England and a man of active dominating and inquiring spirit he had been very properly chosen to be a member of the Committee and indeed was almost the manager of the institution and the stewards and waiters bowed before him as reverentially as to a Duke or a Field Marshall <sup>12</sup>

Since *Pendennis* is a semi autobiographical novel it is also pertinent to consider the Major's connection with his nephew Pen, in whom Thackeray drew a partial self portrait He is Pen's selfish old Mentor <sup>13</sup> who seeks by his worldly counsels to form the young man into a pattern Regency gentleman He introduces Pen to society and teaches him its customs and usages And Pen learns from him a thousand legends and scandals of the London world.

Now among Thackeray's associates in the later eighteen thirties there was a man whose history was precisely that assigned to Major Pendennis in Thackeray's novel and who played much the same role in Thackeray's life as the Major does in Pen's This was Lt Colonel Merriek Shawe Thackeray's uncle by marriage How exactly he resembled Major Pendennis may be seen from a sketch of his history a sketch derived it may be mentioned in passing almost entirely from manuscript sources in the British Museum the Public Record Office and the Genealogical Office at Dublin Castle

## II

The Shawes came to Ireland from Chester in the seventeenth century <sup>14</sup> The first of the clan about whom precise information is obtainable was the Rev Fielding Shawe D D who was born in 1659 and died in 1728 He married Jane Harte a niece of John Vesey Archbishop of Tuam and had eight children by her His second son Merriek Shawe born 1692 graduated from Trinity College Dublin, in 1709 and settling at Mulpit Galway became Rector of Athenny Merriek Shawe had five children His two younger sons Merriek and Robert went into the army possibly through the interest of their cousins Thomas and Henry Shawe who were also infantry officers Merriek was a Captain when he died in the West Indies in 1780 and Robert survived till 1811 dying a Brigadier General The Rev Merriek Shawe's



older son, Matthew, who was born about 1736, became a barrister and settled at Lodge, county Galway

It is with Matthew's family that we are concerned. He first married Jane, daughter of Patrick Fersse, of nearby Spring Garden. Fersse was a wealthy man by the standards of rural Ireland, and his daughter was known among the Shawes, who belonged to the lesser Anglo-Irish gentry, as the "Countess"<sup>15</sup> Matthew had one son by her, Merrick, born—it would appear—in the early seventeen-seventies. After her death Matthew married Mary, daughter of Peter Moore, of Castle Pollard, county Meath, who bore him four boys and four girls. This large family grew up in entire harmony at Lodge, the father acting as his children's tutor, and Merrick taking a benevolent interest in his younger half-brothers and half-sisters.

As Merrick approached manhood, he found a patron in Colonel William Trench of Corbally Park, with whom he went hunting,<sup>16</sup> and he was commissioned an Ensign in the first Connaught Regiment of Fencibles.<sup>17</sup> But he was an exceptionally bright and alert lad, and his talents were clearly wasted in the Galway countryside. He welcomed the proposal of his uncle Robert, a Captain in His Majesty's 76th Foot, that he join that regiment as an Ensign. His father wrote to Robert on 7 May 1789

Merrick is Very Much Obligated to you for thinking of him. Nothing woud Give him greater pleasure than to Join you in India. And if a Vacancy happens I hope you will be able to Got Lord Cornwallis and Col Musgrave to recommend him in wh Case I have hope for Success—As for purchasing for him that is out of my power for the 500£ wch was his poor Mothers fortune is by Settlement on the Estate of Spring Garden, & cannot be touched till he is of age. Nor then I fear without a Lawsuit. Merrick is Very Clever at Figures is a Good Latin & French scholar & knows some Italian Rides & Dances perfectly well.<sup>18</sup>

Earl Cornwallis and Sir Thomas Musgrave respectively, Commander-in-Chief of the Indian army and commanding officer of the 76th Foot, approved Robert Shawe's proposal and Merrick Shawe was instructed to come out to India. The sale of his Irish commission brought him enough money for his wardrobe and travelling expenses, and friends came to his assistance. "Fersse gave him 5 Guineas wch is more than I Expected as he is a Great Miser," wrote his father. "His friend Coll Trench yesterday put a paper with Ten Guineas into his hand with a memorandum to Bye him some feathers fitt for Fishing."<sup>19</sup> By March of 1790 he had said goodbye to his many relations and was on his way to London.

He sailed for India aboard the *Hawke* and by November was

in Calcutta In April of 1791 his father noted the arrival at Lodge of his first letter from the east which has made a Holly day as he is a Great Favorite <sup>20</sup> For three months Shawe served with the 73rd Foot but on 19 January 1790 the expected vacancy in the 76th occurred and he joined that regiment The 76th saw no action during this year but in 1791 and 1792 it had a leading part in the Mysore War Shawe participated in the siege and assault of the fortified town of Bangalore in March 1791 He fought against Tippu Sultan's forces at Seringapatam in May and experienced the retreat complicated by disease and famine which followed that engagement In December he was one of the detachment that captured Savandroog the Hill of Death In February 1792 he was severely wounded in Cornwallis's great victory at Seringapatam Though the engagement brought him a lieutenantcy vice E Brooke killed in action he henceforth carried a bullet in his shoulder <sup>21</sup>

During the next seven years while the 76th Foot had garrison duty at Fort William he acquired a knowledge of British India that made him widely respected and displayed marked business capacities Some time before 1799 he became Adjutant of the Calcutta Militia He must have given great satisfaction in this post for his brother officers banded together in that year to present him with a sword and the price of a company <sup>22</sup> His captaincy was dated from 26 May 1800 <sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile sad news had reached him from Ireland His father had been much shaken by reading his name in the list of casualties at Seringapatam <sup>24</sup> Two years later Matthew Shawe complained that his sight was failing though he was still able to teach Merrick's half brothers I have so often read the Classics he explained, They are quite familiar <sup>25</sup> A premonition that his end was near led him to add If it did no harm to your Interest I could wish to see you before I Die <sup>26</sup> Upon his demise in 1796 Merrick who cannot have been more than twenty five became head of the family He made his stepmother and sisters an allowance and later obtained commissions in the army for three of his half brothers

On 17 June 1799 General St Leger asked Shawe to become his A D C remarking I am certain that I shall receive great advantage from your knowledge and experience of India <sup>27</sup> This was a flattering offer as a common friend pointed out for the advantages of joining St Leger's family were substantial <sup>28</sup> Shawe nevertheless declined it Even brighter prospects were opening out before him His superiors in the Calcutta Militia

he told St Leger, "wrote to Lord Mornington in my favor at a time when it was believed I should accompany my regt to the coast on Service—and his Lordship's answer implied a wish that I should not leave the Corps"<sup>29</sup> Lord Mornington was the Governor-General of India At the end of 1799 Shawe joined his staff<sup>30</sup> This was the critical step of his life

### III

For the next thirty-five years Shawe's fortunes were linked with those of Marquess Wellesley, as Lord Mornington became in 1800 Between 1799 and 1805 Shawe served Wellesley successively as A D C, Military Secretary, and Private Secretary<sup>31</sup> In the last post, which he occupied for nearly three years, Shawe was the Marquess's principal man of business, and the Wellesley papers in the British Museum include dozens of volumes of the correspondence which he received and answered These documents show him to have been a most discreet, orderly, and indefatigable subordinate, with a remarkable head for detail In a word, he was worthy of a master who has long been recognized as one of the great administrators of English history

Wellesley earned this reputation by his Governor-Generalship Born in 1760, and educated at Eton and Oxford, he had succeeded to his father's Irish peerage when he was barely twenty-one For a time he devoted himself chiefly to the interests of his family, which included three brothers who were themselves to rise to the peerage In 1786 he entered parliament, where talent and influential connections brought him a success that led to his Indian appointment As Governor-General he found scope for abilities hitherto hidden When Shawe joined his staff, he had already achieved the conquest of Mysore, the first of the series of brilliant transactions that marked his proconsulship Shawe attributed Wellesley's accomplishments primarily to his keen judgment and comprehensive mental grasp "[He is] his own Secretary at War," Shawe noted, "his own minister of foreign relations, his own master General of ordnance, and his own Chancellor of Exchequer There is no clashing of Departments, nor is anything left to chance"<sup>32</sup>

Personally Wellesley was autocratic and masterful in the extreme He was impatient of opposition and arbitrary in overruling his critics He felt that Sir John Shore, his predecessor as Governor-General, had shamefully degraded the dignity of the government by living on terms of intimacy with the civil

servants of the East India Company Both temperament and policy caused Wellesley to hold himself aloof from Calcutta society So ceremonious was the respect he demanded from his subjects that even his friends were moved to protest They pointed out that George the Third himself asked less of his courtiers Then the King is wrong Wellesley replied but that is no reason why I should improperly relax also <sup>23</sup> His imperious stiffness made him exceedingly unpopular The old Civilians are bitterly offended Shawe told Henry Wellesley the Marquess's brother after the latter's return to England in 1803 They are the vainest class of people in the world and have hitherto considered themselves the most enlightened and the most polished *Gentlemen* in the universe They complain Shawe continues, because the Governor General will not don a white waistcoat and congee cap smoke a hookah and invite them to Government House but you know that it was impossible for a man of Lord Wellesley's Rank manners & education to like the people of the Bengal Service The good opinion of the *grands* of Calcutta could easily be obtained by a month of dinners and the expenditure of about two chests of Claret but it is not worth the purchase All Jacobins & all Rogues would still hate him & will continue to do so to the end of time <sup>24</sup>

During his first months in India Wellesley seems to have displayed an almost equal hauteur towards his staff He had left his family in England, and on 21 February 1799 he wrote to Lord Grenville from Madras of his magnificent solitude where I stalk about like a Royal Tiger without even a friendly jackall to soothe the severity of my thoughts <sup>25</sup> On settling in Calcutta however he admitted his subordinates to a friendship which he denied the outside world Among them he revealed himself to be the most polished and gracious of *grands seigneurs* When Lord Wellesley is well & not annoyed Shawe wrote to Henry Wellesley describing the amusements of the Governor General and his bachelor associates at Barrackpore in the summer of 1803 you know how lightly business sits on him <sup>26</sup> Indeed Shawe continued, so great is the intimacy which Wellesley allows his staff that Calcutta gossip accuses him Captain Sydenham Colonel Harcourt and the rest

of having withdrawn ourselves from Society from motives of Contempt for the respectable inhabitants of this great City and from Sentiments of inordinate pride which has no other foundation than the favour and indulgence of Lord Wellesley which is said to have spoiled us, and to have made us forgetful of what we are <sup>27</sup>

Where Wellesley was concerned, Shawe never forgot what he was. He reports the state of the Marquess's health and the alterations in his temper with all the reverent minuteness of Saint-Simon recording the personal habits of Louis XIV. His references to his patron invariably breathe admiration and awe. Observe him admonishing a correspondent who has allowed himself angry outbursts in official letters: "It is not always in my power to exercise my own discretion on any paper that is sent to me. If I receive it in *the presence* the paper must be seen."<sup>38</sup> Yet Shawe never seems fulsome or insincere, because he obviously regards the difference in rank between himself and Wellesley as part of the nature of things and behaves accordingly. We find him honestly delighted in a situation that would have tried the patience of a less confirmed worshipper; having brought his half-sister Jane to Bengal in 1803, he wrote to her mother:

She is a great favorite of Lord Wellesley who is pleased with her good Nature and never misses an opportunity of extracting from her (in spite of my efforts to the contrary) Irish anecdotes of Lodge &c &c for which I am afterwards quizzed unmercifully.<sup>39</sup>

But there was nothing malicious in Wellesley's quizzing; he felt an esteem for Shawe which was based on real liking and respect. Shawe's private correspondence sufficiently testifies that he was an amusing companion as well as an acute man of business. His gift for lively social observation is illustrated in his letters to Henry Wellesley. He tells how a military review has gone off "with great success in spite of a very heavy fog which dissolved Colonel Gicen's rouge."<sup>40</sup> He describes "Captain Daniel's marriage with Miss Thorne—Sydenham & I arrived from Barrackpore just in time to see Lady Anstruther throw a glass of water in the Bride's face at the close of the ceremony to prevent her from fainting. I believe she wasted her water very unnecessarily."<sup>41</sup> He has a good deal to say about George Barlow, whom the Court of Directors had designated to succeed Wellesley as Governor-General. Shawe deplored the appointment, thinking it unwise to choose a Governor-General "from the bosom of the Civil Service,"<sup>42</sup> and he foresaw trouble when Barlow's wife became the first lady of British India. "He will find it an arduous task to maintain an appearance of dignity while she is swiping around the Government House."<sup>43</sup> Mrs. Barlow was constantly quarrelling with Lady Anstruther and Lady Russell, who regarded her as an upstart. "Mr. B. is even now not quite neutral in the wars between the females," Shawe

wrote and he has a special hatred of Lady A. He complained bitterly to Lord Wellesley lately of her having forced him to carve a Turkey. Whoever beholds the next administration in India will have some amusement. <sup>41</sup> One understands how the Duke of Wellington was later able to recommend Shawe and his friend Sydenham to the Duke of Richmond, who was looking for a private secretary as most gentlemanlike men well informed and complete men of business as well as pleasant men in society. <sup>42</sup>

Shawe had met Colonel Arthur Wellesley the Marquess's younger brother and later the Duke of Wellington not long after the latter's arrival in India in 1788. Shawe was at once impressed by the fashion in which before he was in command his critical study of his profession afforded a marked contrast to the general habits of that time and country. <sup>43</sup> A story that Shawe told John Wilson Croker to illustrate Wellington's concentration upon military matters may be cited as evidence of the two men's early friendship.

The Duke inherits his father's musical taste [Shawe related] and used to play very well, and rather too much, on the violin. Some circumstances occurred which made him reflect that this was not a soldierly accomplishment and took up too much of his time and thoughts and he burned his fiddle, and never played again. About the same time he gave up the habit of card playing. <sup>44</sup>

During Wellesley's great campaigns against the Marathas he preferred to correspond with Shawe rather than directly with the Governor-General. He candidly explained to his brother when the latter betrayed annoyance at this arrangement that Shawe always answered him and that his replies usually contained helpful information about affairs at the Bengal Presidency. <sup>45</sup> The friendship continued throughout Shawe's life and after his return to England he was a useful intermediary during the coolnesses that not infrequently existed between the two brothers.

The preferment that Shawe received from Wellesley raised the penniless ensign of 1780 to an affluence of which he had never dreamed. Not only was he able to discharge most liberally his obligations towards his family in Ireland he also advanced his own career in a fashion that might have been envied by the younger son of a ducal house. In the summer of 1803 he was negotiating simultaneously for his majority which was to cost him £4 600— Being so low down, he explained to his uncle Robert it [is] worth my while to give a long price — <sup>46</sup> and for his lieutenant-colonelcy. I shall never again enjoy such an office as that which I now hold he wrote in October of the same year. If I should remain another year in India my

Treasury would contain four or five thousand pounds after paying for my Lieutt Coloneley''<sup>50</sup> When in December he at last sent the feathers he had promised fourteen years before to his early patron Colonel Trench, who had emerged from recent wholesale creations of Irish peers as Viscount Dunlo and Earl of Clanarty, he remarked that "Lord Wellesley's extraordinary Kindness has opened to me the prospect of becoming a *Comfortable Freeholder* in the County of Galway at no very distant period when Lord Dunlo may reckon on one more steady voter''<sup>51</sup> By August 1805, when he sailed for home with Lord Wellesley, his exchequer must have been full indeed

#### IV

Arriving in England in January, 1806, after a long voyage around the Cape of Good Hope, Shawe found himself placed on half-pay "Applied for employment immediately," he noted in his statement of services "Served as Assistant Adjutant General in Ireland during 1806, but having repeated my application for active service was appointed to the Fifth Garrison Battalion''<sup>52</sup> He held this post, the duties of which were not arduous, for nearly three years

Meanwhile, he remained closely associated with Wellesley England was not merely indifferent to the Marquess's Indian achievements, she seemed actually to resent them George the Third had prophesied, while Wellesley was still in India, that "when he returns his head will be quite turned, and there will be no enduring him''<sup>53</sup> The *Creevey Papers* further illustrate the hostility with which the Wellesleys were regarded by their political enemies In 1808 Samuel Whitbread was "not sorry to see the Wellesley pride a little lowered", Cobbett in the same year spoke of "the arrogance of that damned infernal family", and in 1810 Lord Milton described the Marquess as "a great calamity inflicted upon England''<sup>54</sup> For two years Wellesley's régime as Governor-General was subjected to Parliamentary scrutiny Shawe helped him to prepare his papers for this ordeal,<sup>55</sup> and remained Wellesley's confidant while it continued

On 7 February 1809 Shawe at last was restored to active service, being transferred from the half-pay of the 5th Garrison Battalion to the Lieutenant-Coloneley of his old regiment The major event during his command of the 76th Foot was Lieutenant-General Chatham's ill-fated campaign against enemy shipping and installations at Flushing, and Waleheren The 76th took

part in the siege of Flushing in July and August of 1809<sup>56</sup> and was one of the regiments left behind to garrison Walcheren Island when General Chatham withdrew his main force in September. Fever overtook the regiment there and by November 539 of its 640 men and officers had been invalided home. On 10 May 1810 Shawe retired from the army by selling his commission after seeing the last of his regiment out of Walcheren.<sup>57</sup>

Uncertain health may have caused Shawe to give up the army. He had three months sick leave in 1810 the first during his twenty-two years of service<sup>58</sup> and he can hardly have escaped from Walcheren untouched by fever. But another motive was certainly his desire to free himself from all obligations except those to Wellesley who re-entered political life after parliament vindicated his preconsulship in 1808. Wellesley served as Ambassador to the Central Junta of Spain in 1809 and upon his return to England in December of that year became Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. A long memorandum which Shawe drew up at St. Jean de Luz in 1814 shows that he was Wellesley's closest confidant and customary companion during the three years that the Marquess held this office. Long service had given Shawe privileges that he would not have thought of claiming in India.

I have often ventured to tell Lord Wellesley [he wrote] when he complained of the stories told of him, that if he would live as other people—dine out, go to the opera, and mix with the world, they would not accuse him of keeping bad company when he was passing a quiet evening at home—and further that if he would give his opinions fair play by meeting his parliamentary and other friends often at his own table or theirs, and employing one-half the eloquence thrown away upon Sydenham, Smith, and me in stating and enforcing his own view of public affairs, he would lead the country in spite of twenty such Junias as were opposed to him.<sup>59</sup>

But Wellesley's vanity and authoritarian temper intensified by his Indian experience of supreme power had unfitted him for the rough and tumble of English party politics—and he found it impossible to follow Shawe's judicious counsel. In 1812 a sharp disagreement with his colleagues led to his resignation. When he failed to justify his withdrawal from the Cabinet to an expectant House of Lords Canning told him that he had walked into the House the greatest man in England and had walked out the least.<sup>60</sup> The Prince Regent nevertheless directed him to form a coalition ministry after Perceval's assassination a few weeks later—but Wellesley had shortly to abandon this commission finding himself unable to obtain the necessary co-operation. Wellesley's last opportunity of playing a leading role in English



public life having thus slipped through his fingers, Shawe had perforce to seek employment elsewhere

During most of the Regency Shawe served at the Horse Guards on the staff of the Duke of York, in whom also he found a personal friend<sup>61</sup> He evidently occupied a position of considerable responsibility, for on 3 April 1815 we find him writing an official letter to Wellington "in the absence of Major-General Sir Henry Torrens," Military Secretary to the Commander-in-Chief<sup>62</sup> On 1 November 1818 Wellesley asked him to intercede with Torrens for a friend, and 22 July 1819 Wellesley again asked his help with "the Duke of York through Torrens"<sup>63</sup> Late in 1819 Shawe left the Horse Guards to become a Commissioner of Stamps The post was worth £1,000 a year, and since he was also a resident director of the United Empire Assurance Company, a "situation the income & advantages of which may be estimated at the least at £200 a year,"<sup>64</sup> he was apparently snugly placed for life But, as we shall see, he retained his Commissionership only until 1823<sup>65</sup>

Throughout these years Shawe enjoyed a very considerable social position An urbane and polished officer and man of affairs, closely affiliated with such grandees as the Duke of York, Wellesley, and Wellington, he knew everyone and went where he pleased in the Regency world In 1811 he visited the Prince Regent at Oatlands with Wellesley, and found George's favorite Lord Yarmouth most confidential<sup>66</sup> On 12 June 1821 we find him dining with John Wilson Croker in a party that included Lord Yarmouth, Lord Lowther, Sydney Smith, and Theodore Hook<sup>67</sup> On 14 December 1822 he wrote Wellesley giving an account of his recent activities Before leaving London he had dined with Lord Sidmouth and seen Lord Holland Some weeks at great houses in Essex, Cambridgeshire, Wiltshire, and Hampshire, had terminated in visits to the Duke of Grafton at Wakefield Lodge and to Cosgrove Priory, Stoney Stratford, where, Shawe laments, "the frost has spoiled our hunting"<sup>68</sup> These occasional glimpses of him in the surviving records of the age may be presumed to afford a fair sample of the company that he kept

Shawe also played his part in encouraging the establishment of West End clubs, which was so significant a feature of the social life of this period He was a founding member of both the Travellers' and the senior United Service, and he served on the committee of the former club during the first three years of its existence<sup>69</sup> The Travellers', it should be pointed out, is the

scene of the first chapter of *Pendennis* indeed the exact position of Major Pendennis's breakfast table by the fire and yet near the window <sup>70</sup> can still be located in the morning room as the dining room of the club's early years has since become

Shawe's closest intimates remained Lord Wellesley and his associates particularly Sydenham and Charles Culley Smith who had married Wellesley's sister the former Lady Anne Wellesley Wellesley's letters to Shawe provide glimpses of this circle and Shawe's place in it Some of them are concerned with hunting a pastime in which Shawe was an expert and Wellesley an amateur On 1 November 1818 Wellesley wrote from Winchfield I have had some sport here notwithstanding the Warden's restrictions he is as incomprehensible as the Hindu mythology Syd the Sportsman became a good shot by sudden inspiration he cannot boast too much of his performance for a first day I am toddling on and if I should live to the age of Methusalem may hope to be a tolerable shot on the morning previous to my demise <sup>71</sup> On 22 July of the following year Wellesley sent Shawe from Belmont House an account of the amusements which the latter's illness prevented him from enjoying

At this place I take a great deal of exercise firing at gulls among the rocks, at Pigeons, &c. & stumping up hills on a pony Yesterday we passed with the Great Hollo shooting at Rabbits in the morning, & then dining on Turbot, Venison, cum Claret Champagne, Ice Pines, peaches, nectarines, Apricots &c I am such a favorite that he put a haunch of venison in the Boot of the carriage as a practical joke. Edward desires to be kindly remembered to you he shot a couple of Rollies rabbits running; his Irish boy being asked what sport we had said We killed nine rabbits, & one of them was a Leveret. Your friend Cornish dined at Rolle's & seemed much amused at the riot, which was enormous & much increased by Sandby who is here with Edward & who turned out with a great paradox, & was hunted full cry for an hour <sup>72</sup>

Another of Wellesley's letters testifies to the excellence of Shawe's palate My Dear Colonel Wellesley wrote to him on 12 October 1814 you are covered with glory—your partridges were the best I have eaten this season your padding in the belly answered admirably and your claret (which arrived with the birds) is the finest I ever tasted After a series of questions in which Wellesley respectfully defers to Shawe's authority he is requested to provide the Marquess with as much of this wine as he can even to the extent of six Hogsheads <sup>73</sup>

Not all of Wellesley's tastes were so innocent His private life had always been irregular He had five illegitimate children by Hyacinthe Gabrielle Roland before he made her lady Mornington in 1794 and after he returned from India, he lived almost

entirely apart from his wife Creevey wrote in 1810 of Wellesley's "profligate establishment" and his "*Cyprian*" named "Poll Raffle" <sup>74</sup> The only illustration that this aspect of Wellesley's character receives in his correspondence with Shawe is a cryptic note from Richmond of 18 April 1818, which can hardly be dismissed, however, as amounting to no more than Mr Pickwick's "chops and tomata sauce"

My Dear Colonel,

I have heard nothing from Lightfoot for some days Pray let me know, what you are doing The arrangements which I mentioned are now become very pressing both here & at Ramsgate Ever yours

W

Finely confused & charmingly alarming proceedings for Legitimate Rogering—Illicit love seems to be the safest & most moral course <sup>75</sup>

Shawe's correspondence has about it an air of decorousness which makes one wonder if he was entirely at ease playing Leporello to this Don Juan of fifty-seven But no doubt the Marquess's quality reconciled him to everything

V

In 1822 Wellesley, who had returned to public life as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland the year before, pressed Shawe to rejoin his staff <sup>76</sup> Shawe was loath to give up his seat at the Board of Stamps, though glad to serve as his patron's confidential representative in England <sup>77</sup> Wellesley persisted, however, and on 28 July 1823 Shawe wrote to Charles Arbuthnot, joint-secretary of the Treasury under Lord Liverpool, declaring his willingness to serve the Marquess, but adding "at my time of life (which has chiefly been a life of toil & confinement) I trust I shall not be deemed unreasonable in wishing to reserve the option of office or a Pension" <sup>78</sup> It was arranged that he should be paid a pension of £1,000 (half on the English and half on the Irish establishment) when he ceased to hold the office of private secretary to the Lord Lieutenant (a post worth £927) or one of equivalent value <sup>79</sup>

Shawe remained in Ireland with Wellesley until the latter's resignation in 1828 He performed much the same services as he had in India, though with greatly enhanced authority Wellesley made much use of him on confidential missions to England, and such statesmen as Wellington, Peel, and Canning treated him with all the confidence that they would have shown his principal <sup>80</sup>

He took a prominent part in the ceremonies attendant on Wellesley's second marriage on 29 October 1825 to Marianno Patterson an American widow hardly more than half the Marquess's age.<sup>81</sup> Shawe and the now Lady Wellesley became firm friends and corresponded frequently in later years.<sup>82</sup>

Wellesley kept the same state in Ireland that he had in India. On 6 June 1826 indeed, Shawe found it necessary to write to Sir William Knighton Keeper of the Privy Purse to George IV explaining away an article in the *New Monthly Magazine* which accused Wellesley of aping royal magnificence at a Dublin charity ball.<sup>83</sup> Though Wellesley's great abilities were recognized his imperiousness made him as objectionable to certain elements in Irish society as he had been to the East India Company's servants in Calcutta. Creevey noted in 1824 that the Marquess had recently dismissed four officers about the court for drinking as a toast at a Beefsteak Club dinner. Success to the export trade of Ireland and may Lord Wellesley be the first article exported!<sup>84</sup>

When Wellesley returned to England in 1828 Shawe remained in his confidential service. His government pension presumably made it unnecessary for him to seek supplementary employment. Wellesley was for three years Lord Steward of the Household but even in his seventies he still longed for authority. It was in a mood of triumph that he sent Shawe a note on 2 September 1833 announcing that they would shortly return to Ireland.<sup>85</sup> Creevey who dined at Dublin Castle in November supplies a characteristically lively picture of the Marquess in his last public office. Creevey was already a favorite of Lady Wellesley's and the Marquess was ready to forgive his past transgressions.

After we had been there some time [Creevey relates], enter their excellencies arm in arm as King and Queen, bowing condescendingly to their little circle till the little Marquis with his piercing eyes said 'That is Mr Creevey I'm sure' and then coming forward he took hold of my hand with both of his and said 'I am glad to have caught you at last, Mr Creevey' at dinner from the time we sat down for a couple of hours, I should say the Marquis and I had such an incessant run of jokes and stories that we quite convulsed all our household. In spirits and accuracy in recollection quotation &c. &c. Wellesley might be fairly instead of 75.<sup>86</sup>

The Marquess was particularly delighted when Creevey inquired about his head of police Sir John Harvey— a large handsome man but by far the most vulgar would be gentleman you ever beheld extremely dressy withal— Who was the gentleman with the ombroddered stomach?<sup>87</sup> No one enjoyed the evening more than Shawe unkindly described by Creevey as a belonging

of Wellesley's in India of 30 years' standing,"<sup>88</sup> who wrote to a friend in England that "Mr Creevey by agreeableness has greatly contributed to Ld Wellesley's happiness, and to *his years*"<sup>89</sup>

Wellesley retired from office late in 1834. On his return to England Shawe for a time gave the Duke of Wellington the benefit of his extensive experience in drawing up the Irish Church Reform Bill.<sup>90</sup> He then busied himself in helping to procure for Wellesley a grant from the East India Company in belated acknowledgment of the Marquess's services as Governor-General. On 1 November 1837 he had the pleasure of sending Wellesley an account of the meeting of East India Company stockholders at which a gift of £20,000 to him was approved.<sup>91</sup> This was his last important service to his patron. Wellesley still wanted a dukedom, but the men of his generation and Shawe's no longer guarded the fountain of honor, and this final ambition was never realized.

Shawe settled down to a life of leisure at 26 South Street, Grosvenor Square, a few doors from Lord Melbourne.<sup>92</sup> It was here that Thackeray came to know him when he visited London in April, 1836 to confer with his stepfather regarding the projected *Constitutional* newspaper. The two hit it off from the first. After their initial encounter, Thackeray told Isabella that he "liked the old gentleman very much, he was exceedingly kind, & cordial."<sup>93</sup> Another meeting a few days later led him to write of Shawe "a dear old gentleman he is, so good so honest, & so fond of you, that he has quite won my heart."<sup>94</sup> When Thackeray and his wife moved to London in 1837, they saw Shawe constantly. Through his friend Edward Sterling, a staff writer for the *Times*, Shawe got Thackeray a post as book-reviewer for that newspaper. And his connections in the peerage and in parliament enabled him to supply franks for Thackeray's letters, an important service in the days before the penny post.

Shawe spent the winter of 1839-1840 in Ireland and on the continent, passing some time with Lord Brougham at Nice.<sup>95</sup> But old age was taking its toll. Thackeray spoke of him in December of 1839 as a "poor old man",<sup>96</sup> and in March of the following year Isabella noted "He writes to Arthur [Shawe] in good spirits apparently and with a steady hand. I fear his money matters are in a sad state."<sup>97</sup>

Thanks to the hospitality of his many friends, Shawe was nevertheless able to repeat his continental tour the following winter. The last of his preserved letters to Wellesley was

written from Rome on 14 April 1841. He had just received from the Marquess a copy of the resolution in which the Court of Directors of the East India Company provided for the erection of a statue of Wellesley in the court room of the East India House. He replied with his usual courtliness. That you should have found time to write to me at a moment of such excitement and that you should have had the kindness to devote a moment to impart to me intelligence of a nature so gratifying to all your friends, is duly appreciated & deeply felt by me. Shawe was pleased as well by the cordial reconciliation between your brother Arthur and yourself which had grown out of the Company's action. I always felt convinced that a free explanation would produce it. It appears that the Duke has naturally & worthily availed himself of the present occasion. I trust it will be a source of happiness to you both & I am persuaded that no one will rejoice at it more than His Grace & that it will afford great relief to his mind. Shawe goes on to tell of his own affairs. The last four months he had spent in Naples living chiefly with Lord and Lady Sligo. At the end of the month he expects his old friend Lord Lynedoch [who] has been at Malta all the Winter. He is above 95 & he rides every day & generally dines at the Club. In Rome he has seen all the shews & ceremonies of the Holy Week which I have heard your Lordship describe. The fireworks at St Angelo were also very magnificent but did not surpass the fireworks at Lucknow or at the Government House. He intends to return to England by way of Florence Venice the Tirol and the Rhine.<sup>99</sup>

Recording the arrival of a letter from Shawe a few days later Thackeray noted that there also has come a very pathetic one from his servt hoping for the return of his dear Colonel.<sup>100</sup> But Shawe had to disappoint his faithful valet. His income was substantially reduced and he found it necessary to remove to Marine Terrace Kingstown Ireland near his half sisters Mary Shawe (his favorite now as she had been nearly forty years earlier when he wrote to her mother. I am prepared to entertain a very particular esteem and affection for that young Lady)<sup>100</sup> and Jane Corrells. There he passed his last years in surroundings gloomy enough. Thackeray wrote to his mother after dining with him in September of 1842.

The Old Colonel continues very comfortable in health. That little Corallies [sic] is an odious conceited vulgar little wretch and in order to show his consequence to me bullied his poor little boy during dinner time in the most unjust

& brutal way It must be a hard thing for the poor old Colonel who has been used to refined and educated gentlemen all his life to be obliged to put up with such a snob for constant society and with the old ladies that form good old Miss Shawe's twaddling old circle

She is a very nice creature, kind simple and tender hearted I wish you could see the dinner-table though, and the awe in wh they all are of little humpey, who sate swaggering and bragging in the most wonderful way He produced with a great manifesto a bottle of claret saying with a roguish look to the ladies 'I know the ladies are fond of clart?—and people were helped and he asked in triumph, Isn't it a fine sound wine?—Nobody dared tell the truth except me, that it was very bad, and whiv should one say otherwise to such a little self-sufficient creature ?<sup>101</sup>

The despondency that these surroundings induced in the Colonel was intensified towards the end of the month by alarming rumours concerning the serious illness of the Marquess Wellesley Inquiring into this report on 26 September, he used the occasion to congratulate Alfred Montgomery, his successor as Wellesley's private secretary, on his approaching marriage It was his desire, he wrote,

to wish you all the happiness that we old Bachelors are taught to believe belongs to that state—of this I am sure that no one becomes an old Bachelor from choice, though many survive the lot for years Do not think them very useful beings—old Maids are much more useful & in some respects necessary—But an old Bachelor is a very doubtful & seldom a voluntary character<sup>102</sup>

Wellesley died in his eighty-third year on the day this letter was written His faithful friend did not long survive him Shawe's last scene was one that Thackeray himself might have conceived in his darker moods a polished gentleman who had served his country actively and well for nearly half a century, who had for thirty years cheerfully enjoyed the best English society, whose taste in wines had been celebrated, reduced to maudlin remorse at the thought of his bachelorhood, as he sipped "little humpey's" bad claret in an Irish boarding-house Shawe's death was announced in the *Dublin Evening Packet* of 7 November 1843, where it is written that "The gallant Colonel was beloved by all who knew him He was a most benevolent, sincere, and warm-hearted friend"<sup>103</sup> But his real memorial is Thackeray's *Pendennis*

## VI

Out of his recollections of Shawe Thackeray fashioned a wonderfully life-like portrait of a superannuated Regency gentleman So faithful is Thackeray's picture, indeed, that Shawe's history may be regarded almost as a projection backward of

Major Pendennis's career We know the Major in Thackeray's novel as Thackeray knew Shawe in the years after 1830 as an old man who has given up active life He is out of touch with the times he even on occasion displays a regrettable penchant for twaddling Thackeray allows the young blackleg Bloundell Bloundell to speak in the most contemptuous terms about him to say that everybody knew old Pen regular old trencherman at Gaunt House notorious old bore regular old foggy <sup>101</sup> Yet it is obvious that Major Pendennis has not always been a senile social butterfly The enviable position that he still retains in the London world is a testimony to substantial accomplishments in the past In dealing with critical situations that arise during the course of the novel—Pen's infatuation with the Fotheringhay the attempt of his own valet Morgan to blackmail him—the old negotiator <sup>102</sup> as Thackeray calls him conducts himself with all the coolness and adroitness of a practiced man of affairs Knowing Shawe's history we understand better why Thackeray has so portrayed Major Pendennis <sup>103</sup>

The two keys to the Major's character are selfishness and simplicity I am an old soldier begad he says and I learned in early life to make myself comfortable <sup>107</sup> So he sinks all his fortune in an annuity to achieve an income that will allow him to figure creditably among his fashionable friends Dammy air! he remarks life without money and the best society isn't worth having <sup>108</sup> Yet he is continually betraying his avowed policy of self interest When Pen falls ill the Major puts him into Dr Goodenough's care and hurries off to the Marquis of Steyne's house of Stillbrook, where he was engaged to shoot partridges

But we must do the major the justice to say [Thackeray continues] that he was very unhappy and gloomy in demeanour Waggy and Wenham rallied him about his low spirits; asked whether he was crossed in love? and otherwise diverted themselves at his expense He lost his money at whist after dinner and actually trumped his partner's highest spade And the thoughts of the suffering boy of whom he was proud and whom he loved after his manner kept the old fellow awake half through the night, and made him feverish and uneasy

The next day he was going out shooting, about noon, with some of the gentlemen staying at Lord Steyne's house and the company waiting for the carriages, were assembled on the terrace in front of the house when a fly drove up from the neighbouring station and a grey-headed rather shabby old gentleman jumped out and asked for Major Pendennis It was Mr Bows He took the major aside and spoke to him; most of the gentlemen round about saw that something serious had happened, from the alarmed look of the major's face.

Waggy said, It's a bailiff come down to nab the major but nobody laughed at the pleasantry

Hullo! What's the matter Pendennis? cried Lord Steyne, with his strident voice;— anything wrong?



'It's—it's—my boy that's *dead*,' said the major, and burst into a sob—the old man was quite overcome

'Not dead, my lord, but very ill when I left London,' Mr Bows said, in a low voice

A britzka came up at this moment as the three men were speaking. The peer looked at his watch. 'You've twenty minutes to catch the mail train. Jump in, Pondennis, and drive like h——, sir, do you hear?'<sup>109</sup>

Henry James once described Thackeray as "a great artist whose pathetic effects were sometimes too visibly prepared"<sup>110</sup> But, if age has staled many of Thackeray's elaborately contrived efforts to be moving—for example, the scene around Helen Pendennis's deathbed—the unobtrusive and almost incidental pathos of such episodes as this, and there are many like it in his novels, remains untouched by the passage of time

The Major's simplicity is best shown in his unquestioning deference to the claims of rank and fortune. The democracy of the new age appals him. "We are grown doosidly republican," he complains<sup>111</sup> "Dammy, they don't make gentlemen and ladies now, and in fifty years you'll hardly know one man from another"<sup>112</sup> When Pen appears to be on the point of marrying the Fotheringay, he inquires grandly, "Why are there no such things as *lettres de cachet*—and a Bastille for young fellows of family?" "The major lived in such good company," Thackeray explains, "that he might be excused for feeling like an earl"<sup>113</sup> Taking the world as it is, he desires only to be conventional in his actions and orthodox in his opinions. Consider his advice concerning church-going

'It don't matter so much in town, Pen,' he said, 'for there the women go and the men are not missed. But when a gentleman is *sur ses terres*, he must give an example to the country people, and if I could turn a tune, I oven think I should sing. The Duke of St David's, whom I have the honour of knowing, always sings in the country, and let me tell you, it has a doosed fine effect from the family pew'<sup>114</sup>

The major's absolute conservatism is a large part of his charm. He is delightful to contemplate because he is so entirely predictable, one knows that he will always do what he considers to be the "correct thing"

Finally, the Major's speech is as full of meat and as unfailingly delightful as the language Dickens gives to Pecksniff or to Mrs Gamp. Whether he employs his usual "curt, manly, and straightforward tone," or the "certain drawl, which he always adopted when he was most concerted and fine,"<sup>115</sup> what he has to say is always brilliantly in character. Thackeray's keen ear for the phrase that characterizes is nowhere better shown, for example,

than in the Major's remarks to Pen after the two of them have been invited to dine with the Fokers in Grosvenor Street

Having obtained the entree into Lady Agnes Foker's house, he said to Pen, with an affectionate solemnity which befit the importance of the occasion, it behooves you, my dear boy to keep it. You must mind and never neglect to call in Grosvenor Street when you come to London. I recommend you to read up carefully in Debrett, the alliances and genealogy of the Earls of Roeherville, and if you can, to make some trifling allusions to the family something historical, neat, and complimentary and that sort of thing, which you, who have a poetic fancy can do pretty well. Mr Foker himself is a worthy man, though not of high extraction or indeed much education. He always makes a point of having some of the family porter [Mr Foker is a brewer] served round after dinner which you will on no account refuse, and which I shall drink myself, though all beer disagrees with me confoundedly. And the heroic martyr [Thackeray continues] did actually sacrifice himself as he said he would, on the day when the dinner took place, and old Mr Foker at the head of his table made his usual joke about Foker's Entire. We should all of us, I am sure have liked to see the major's grin, when the worthy old gentleman made his time honoured joke.<sup>114</sup>

As the last sentences show Thackeray is as fond of Major Pendennis in his novel as he had been of Colonel Shawe in life like Pen. He studied his uncle's peculiarities with a constant relish and was always in a good humour with his worldly old mentor.<sup>117</sup> He refers to him as the worthy gentleman, the honest major or the stout old boy.<sup>118</sup> But his affection is cool and judicious. It carries him sympathetically into the mind of his subject without causing him to praise or excuse.<sup>119</sup> The result is perhaps the most finished and perfectly controlled portrait in all of Thackeray's fiction. But it is a portrait like those of Miss Crawley and Jos Sedley of a nature emotionally shallow. Thackeray does not in it explore the profounder aspects of personality as he does in less perfect but more ambitious characters. So *Pendennis* like *Vanity Fair* illustrates the two orders of characterization that one finds in Thackeray's fiction, each of which is an essential part of his comprehensive picture of human life.

## CHAPTER SIX

### ESMOND

#### I

*Esmond* stands apart from the rest of Thackeray's later fiction in that it does not follow the pattern of serial publication established by *Vanity Fair*. "I've been reading back numbers," he noted as he was finishing *Pendennis*. "I lit upon a very stupid part I'm sorry to say and yet how well written it is. What a shame the Author don't write a complete good story!"<sup>1</sup> His critics made the same complaint. Among others George Henry Lewes, whose opinion Thackeray greatly prized, took him to task in the *Leader* for "a want of respect for his art, a want of respect for his public," in a word "for sacrificing the artist to the improvisatore."<sup>2</sup>

In *Esmond* Thackeray sought to remedy this deficiency, to write the "complete good story" that he felt he had in him. He abandoned his remunerative system of publication in monthly parts in order that he might plan and write his book as a unified whole. When his first draft was completed, he devoted several months to revising and expanding it. A second, though more cursory, revision occurred when he saw proof. He was well satisfied with the result. James T. Fields relates how

One day, in the snowy winter of 1852, [he] met Thackeray sturdily ploughing his way down Beacon Street with a copy of 'Henry Esmond' (the English edition then just issued) under his arm. Seeing me some way off, he held aloft the volumes and began to shout in great glee. When I came up to him he cried out, 'Here is the very best I can do, and I am carrying it to Prescott as a reward of merit for having given me my first dinner in America. I stand by this book, and am willing to leave it, when I go, as my card.'<sup>3</sup>

Thackeray was pleased with *Esmond* on another score. *Pendennis* only partially achieved his objective of establishing himself in the eyes of his readers as an essentially kindly and amiable man. Many critics still complained of his preoccupation with the seamy side of life and the darker aspects of human nature. A writer in the *Athenæum* found *Pendennis* a mere continuation of *Vanity Fair* in this respect.

We protest [he said] against the soundness, the sense, nay we must add, the sincerity of this universal demolition principle of making dismal effects every where in a work professing to give us pictures of the world around us.<sup>4</sup>

Samuel Phillips in the *Times* described *Pendennis* as dolorous and depressing. The morale might almost be summed up in the American's creed: There's nothing new, there's nothing true, and it don't signify.\* This criticism too Thackeray sought to meet in *Esmond*. When he was first thinking of *Esmond* early in 1851 he spoke of it as a story in wh. there shall appear some very good lofty and generous people. Perhaps a story without any villain.\* And he remained faithful to this early conception though he did ultimately provide villains of a sort in Lord Mohun and the Pretender.

Yet despite its nobility of tone *Esmond* is the most melancholy of Thackeray's novels, a point of which he was quite aware while he wrote his book and which filled him with the gloomiest forebodings concerning its chances of popular success. The atmosphere of melancholy that pervades *Esmond* is explained if we examine its secret history: if we note down Thackeray's private thoughts and meanings alongside of his story as he invites us to do in a passage already quoted from *Pendennis*.<sup>7</sup> To do this is to trace the relation between *Esmond* and what has come to be known as the Brookfield affair.

That the impress of Thackeray's association with the Brookfields was not long ago recognized testifies to the effectiveness of the smoke-screen laid down in *Mrs Brookfield and her Circle*, a filial tribute compiled by Mrs Brookfield's son Charles with the aid of his wife. They represent the Brookfield union as entirely happy and they suppress all hints of a quarrel between Brookfield and Thackeray. The real story of this triangular relationship was partially told five years ago in Thackeray's *Letters and Private Papers*.<sup>8</sup> It is now possible to complete that story on the basis of further documents which have subsequently come to hand. To compare these new papers which include Mrs Brookfield's correspondence with her husband and most of the letters that she wrote to Thackeray with Charles Brookfield's narrative is to be reminded of what Mandeville said of Shaftesbury:

His Notions I confess are generous and refined. They are a high Compliment to Human-kind, and capable by the help of a little Enthusiasm of inspiring us with the most Noble Sentiments concerning the Dignity of our exalted Nature: What Pity it is that they are not true.

But the reader may judge the case for himself.

## II

Thackeray's friendship with William Henry Brookfield began in the autumn of 1829, when both young men were undergraduates at Cambridge. Brookfield was a clever, handsome youth to whom the university offered a welcome refuge from a dismal boyhood passed in the home of "a rigid dissenting Attorney."<sup>10</sup> Without the customary passports to success in undergraduate society—rank, money, or brilliant abilities—he yet made his way easily by his gentlemanly manners, his admirable faculty of mimicry, and his vein of ready humor. He soon became one of the great men of the university, the intimate of Tennyson, Arthur Henry Hallam, James Spedding, and Richard Monckton Milnes, and Thackeray later recalled that it was considered an honor to be seen walking with him.<sup>11</sup>

The rest of Brookfield's life was an anti-climax. The promise of his Cambridge days was never quite fulfilled. The capital mistake of his career occurred in 1834, when he drifted into the church, not from any sense of dedication, but solely because no other profession seemed to offer so convenient an avenue to preferment. As a clergyman the very qualities that would have made his fortune as a lawyer or as an actor—and the stage was his real vocation, had it been open to a Victorian gentleman—aroused a distrust which he never succeeded in entirely overcoming.

While Brookfield was serving as a curate in Southampton during 1837, he met Jane Octavia Elton. He was then twenty-eight and she sixteen. The youngest daughter of the scholar and country gentleman Charles Elton, later sixth baronet, she had spent an uneventful girlhood in the provincial society of Clifton. She was a tall and stately beauty—her father called her "Glumdaleitch"—, and intelligent enough to be discontented with her country admirers. In comparison with them Brookfield seemed vastly talented and attractive. Brookfield, for his part, was equally taken with this lovely, fresh, and admiring girl. Despite some grumbling from the Eltons on the score of Brookfield's plebeian origins, the two became engaged in 1838. They did not marry until three years later, when Brookfield was given a London curacy. During their long engagement their relationship remained that of genial instructor and adoring pupil. A few months before their wedding, Miss Elton was still beginning her letters, "Dearest Mr Brookfield." She later found a des-

cription of her attitude towards him at this time in the following stanza of *In Memoriam*

Her faith is fast as I cannot move  
 She darkly feels him great and wise  
 She dwells on him with faithful eyes,  
 I cannot understand: I love <sup>11</sup>

The couple settled in the metropolis early in 1842. But the success that Brookfield had anticipated once he enjoyed the great scope of London did not come. He totally lacked the gloss and unction expected of clergymen on their promotion. Though he possessed a sincere and simple faith he would not affiliate himself with any of the parties that then controlled ecclesiastical preferment. He hated equally he said the High Church & the Low Church & the Church between the two. <sup>12</sup> What approval he did win came from persons little likely to be of use to him. Kinglake a Nothingarian who remarked that important if true should be written over the door of every church <sup>13</sup> paid him the damaging compliment that he was never the least demoralised by taking Holy Orders <sup>14</sup>. By 1848 Brookfield had achieved nothing more substantial than an Inspectorship of Schools. The bitterness of hope long deferred is to be detected in his remark to Charles (reviled) Believe me that in our Church there is a great demand for dullness. <sup>15</sup>

To Brookfield's professional disappointments were added a variety of domestic irritations. Brought up in a county family Mrs Brookfield had no practical knowledge of housekeeping and proved a most inefficient helpmate to a poor curate. Her health which had always been delicate became very unsettled after 1844. During several months in 1848 indeed she was an invalid confined to her sofa. Nor did she any longer regard her husband with the adoration of early years. In comparison with the distinguished men she was beginning to meet in London society he had come to seem rather ordinary. It was a final cause of disharmony that though both the Brookfields wanted children they remained childless for nearly ten years.

Like many Victorian husbands Brookfield had rounded Soraglio Point without doubling Capo Turk and he made his wife feel his annoyance at her shortcomings. He reproached her for her domestic inefficiency her lack of interest in his work even for her childlessness. He became cold and reserved at home and sought amusement among his bachelor friends. That she nonetheless managed to explain away even his neglect is evident

from another stanza of *In Memoriam* which she applied to this phase of their history

Her life is lone, he sits apart,  
He loves her yet, she will not weep,  
Tho' rapt in matters dark and deep  
He seems to slight her simple heart <sup>17</sup>

"I am afraid my dear Mrs Brookfield will die," Thackeray wrote during the summer of 1848 "It will be better for her—She never says a word but I know the cause of a great part of her malady well enough—a husband whom she loved with the most fanatical fondness and who—and who is my friend too—a good fellow upright generous kind to all the world except her" <sup>18</sup>

### III

Thackeray had renewed his friendship with Brookfield when the latter settled in London in 1842 For several years Mrs Brookfield regarded him with some disfavor as an unsuitable acquaintance for a clergyman But Thackeray, deprived of the company of his own wife and unable—as he said—to "live without the tenderness of some woman," <sup>19</sup> found in her a new "beau-idéal" "I have been in love with her these four years—," he confessed in 1846, "not so as to endanger peace or appetite but she always seems to me to speak and do and think as a woman should" <sup>20</sup> Yet for some time Thackeray remained Brookfield's friend rather than his wife's

Only in the summer of 1848 did Thackeray's real intimacy with Mrs Brookfield begin He was now a famous man, and his attentions were the more welcome to Mrs Brookfield because of her husband's withdrawal of favor When Brookfield at length reproved her for the increasing closeness of her association with Thackeray, she was goaded to rebellion "I do think at near 30," she wrote to him in October, "one may take up a line of one's own, & where one feels affectionately one may venture to say so, where one is intimate enough for it to be well understood what one means" <sup>21</sup> Two weeks later, when both she and Thackeray were guests at Clevedon Court, the Eltons' country house, she took him into her confidence regarding the failure of her marriage What she told him can be only conjecturally reconstructed No doubt Brookfield's neglect, the humiliating rebuffs with which he met her appeals for affection, and her own ill-health were the burden of her complaint All her life Thackeray's daughter Anne remembered a day when she and her

sister visited the Brookfields home and the master of the house in a fit of petulance mimicked his wife to her face with such devastating fidelity that the little girls were convulsed with laughter and Mrs Brookfield fled weeping from the room <sup>22</sup> I take refuge in stolid silence she wrote to Thackeray in December which is only a type of the useless blank of all my life I cannot find any thing to do that would take me out of such a painful state of sensitiveness that it seems as if it wd come to a crash and end in insanity some day <sup>23</sup>

The relationship that resulted from these confidences continued for the next three years There was a strong physical element in Thackeray's love I once told her he wrote to their common friend Kate Perry that my passion was like that Asit whose story we have read in the Arabian Nights who would have grown as large as the world had the Seal of God not been imprinted on the vase that contained him <sup>24</sup> But what was the great passion of Thackeray's life was scarcely an *amitie amoureuse* to Mrs Brookfield It is not as if Mr Thackeray were some young Adonis in the guards she told her husband

He is far too entirely *vide awakz* not to understand the sisterly feeling I have for him which could not over by any force of circumstances clash with any other affection <sup>25</sup> Yet she found in Thackeray a wonderfully entertaining and sympathetic companion who brought the London world into her drawing room and who answered needs in her emotional nature of which her husband hardly recognized the existence So Thackeray wrote to her upon the death of his friend Charles Buller who for many years had a similar alliance with Lady Ashhurst that this pair were not of the sentimental sort like you & the buffoon your humble Servant and made a practice of condemning as maudlin sentiments wh are not so—but on the contrary natural simple ennobling <sup>26</sup> As for Brookfield he was too sure of his wife's love to be disturbed by jealousy and too fond of Thackeray to deny him what alleviation of his loneliness Mrs Brookfield could provide Furthermore as Thackeray pointed out a part of poor Brookfield's pride of possession was that we should envy him and admire her <sup>27</sup> Confident that he could control the situation and characteristically careless of appearances he was content to permit its continuance

But Brookfield's temper was uncertain and from time to time an unguarded expression on Thackeray's part or a burst of sentiment from Mrs Brookfield caused him to protest When he cracked the whip his wife always came to heel Thackeray



stamps & growls at your having written a very chill letter to him," he told her on one of these occasions "There is no doubt you were right in doing what I wished—and I am much obliged to you—and hereby give you a kiss"<sup>28</sup> To which Mrs Brookfield replied, "I wd be quite content to throw snowballs if I have a kiss from you"<sup>29</sup> But Brookfield did not persist long in his displeasure, and after an interval his wife and Thackeray were able to resume their intimacy

#### IV

When Thackeray began to plan *The History of Henry Esmond* in 1851, he and Mrs Brookfield had come to assume that theirs would be a lifelong friendship He meant hardly less to her than did her husband, while she had long been the center of his emotional life But Brookfield had grown tired of his role The petulance which he had occasionally displayed in earlier years hardened into a permanent attitude While Thackeray was delivering in London his celebrated lectures on *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century* during the early summer, Brookfield was ill in the country<sup>30</sup> He did not rejoin his wife, who had been sharing Thackeray's pleasure in his success, until Thackeray left for the continent in July

Thackeray returned to London late the following month to discover that Brookfield had for some time past been behaving rudely, even brutally, to his wife Dr Johnson's dictum that "it is difficult for a sick man not to be a scoundrel" may perhaps be offered in excuse for his conduct, since his health had taken a turn for the worse, and his doctors thought for a while of sending him off to Italy<sup>31</sup> In any event, his past forbearance towards Mrs Brookfield had disappeared He "says to her face he ought to have married a cook," Thackeray noted, "and treats her like one"<sup>32</sup> Thackeray was not refused admittance to the Brookfield house, but he was made to feel unwelcome there

The misfortune of poor Wms mood [he wrote to Mrs Brookfield] is that it makes perforce hypocrites of you and all who approach him— The fact of your position makes it impossible to write almost—I am not to show that I feel you are miserable I am not to show that I think your husband is wicked and cruel to you I am not to show that I think you know you are unhappy, and are treated with the most cruel tyranny—Nobody is to know anything of your misery We are to go on grinning as if we were happy, because William's cough is certainly very bad, and he should not be disturbed in exercising his temper<sup>33</sup>

A few days later it became obvious that Thackeray and Mrs Brookfield must reconcile themselves to a permanent separation

In a letter to their common friend Kate Perry Thackeray reflected on the whole course of the affair

I don't see how any woman should not love a man who had loved her as I did I : I don't see how any man shd. not love a woman so beautiful, so unhappy so tender I don't see how any husband, however he might have treated his treasure, should be indifferent at the idea of losing it. But that I know I was safe (I mean that any wrong was out of the question on our children's account) I suppose I should have broken away myself. I'm sure that one or the other on their side were wrong in not dissolving me. Of all this weakness, goodness, love generosity vanity playing with edged tools we are now paying the penalty

I see nothing but time to heal this wound of amputation. I grieve that we are all wretched. I wish that I had never loved her I have been played with by a woman, and stung over at a beck from the Lord and master— It's death I tell you between us. I was packing away yesterday the letters of years. These didn't make me cry They made me laugh as I knew they would. It was for this that I gave my heart away It was When are you coming dear Mr Thackeray and William will be so happy and I thought after you had gone away how I had forgot etc. and at a word from Brookfield afterwards it is— I reverence and admire him and love him with not merely a dutiful but a genuine love —Amen. The thought that I have been made a fool of is the bitterest of all, perhaps. We must part in peace I have loved his wife too much to be able to bear to see her belong even to her husband any more—that's the truth."

On September twenty third an open quarrel between Thackeray and Brookfield occurred Words felt to be quite unforgivable were spoken on both sides Thackeray wrote to Miss Perry in returning unexamined a letter that Mrs Brookfield had sent him through another friend

The only thing is Duty Duty Duty Her husband is a good fellow and does love her : and I think of his constant fondness for me & kindness and how cruelly I've stabbed him and outraged him with my words—Well, I'd do it again—though I wish that it could have been any other dagger than mine to strike the blow—The sword must have fallen some day or other I am glad she did her duty and threw me over for him—and though in my moments of pique & rage I don't forgive her I do at better times & say God bless her But we must bear our fates. We shant and cant and must meet again as heretofore—it was for that I stabbed the husband expree to put her up as high as I could and to make the *susammenkunft* impossible Poor old boy I forget that he has ever been cruel and think of 500 jolly meetings and kind greetings I have had from him. Who would have divined that all that friendship, that such a good fellow should end in treason—for a treason it is say what I will."

## V

When Thackeray wrote this letter he had left London for the country where he began to write his novel in a mood of profound melancholy and bitterness But except insofar as it determined the tone of Thackeray's book,<sup>36</sup> the crisis through which he had passed was not at once reflected in *Esmond* The early part of the novel had necessarily to deal with Harry Esmond's

boyhood and the history of his family For the emotional coloring of these chapters Thackeray drew upon memories of his childhood In 1848 he had revisited Addiscombe, his home for two summers as a boy

All sorts of recollections of my youth came back to me [he wrote in his diary], dark and sad and painful with my dear good mother as a gentle angel interposing between me and misery—I went to see our old quarters the chairs in the drawing-room were still ours, and I recognized what I am sure was my mother's bed—it made me feel very queer—My old room is the General's dressing room—how well I remember the cawing of the rooks there of a morning! they were still talking away in the wilderness which is quite unaltered<sup>27</sup>

Here is foreshadowed the central situation of the first six chapters of *Esmond*, the loneliness of Harry's unhappy boyhood and its alleviation by the maternal love of Lady Castlewood, here, indeed, are the very rooks that haunt Castlewood Hall in Thackeray's novel

At about the time that he finished this section of his novel a meeting was arranged between Brookfield and himself by their friends Lord and Lady Ashburton The Ashburtons hoped that all could be made smooth between them before the Brookfields departed for a winter in Madeira "We have not had a reconciliation but a conciliation," Thackeray noted after their conference "The morning was spent in parleys and the Inspector and I shook hands at the end and I'm very thankful that her dear little heart is made tranquil on the score of our enmity at least Friends of course we're not, but bear each other"<sup>28</sup>

The affair was thus formally terminated Thackeray could not dismiss it at once from his mind, but he was able to exorcise it in another way

The writer's life [observes Somersot Maugham] is full of tribulation But he has one compensation Whenever he has anything on his mind, whether it be a harassing reflection, grief at the death of a friend, unrequited love, wounded pride, anger at the treachery of someone to whom he has shown kindness, in short any emotion or any perplexing thought, he has only to put it down in black and white, using it as the theme of a story or the decoration of an essay to forget all about it He is the only free man<sup>29</sup>

During the next three months, as Thackeray wrote the last eight chapters of the first book of *Esmond* and the first two chapters of the second, he again lived through the whole course of the Brookfield affair and made it a part of his novel In the six months that followed, as he wrote the rest of *Esmond*, he sketched out in fantasy the way his relation with Mrs Brookfield might have developed under other circumstances He found his plot, as already outlined, readily adaptable to his preoccupations He

continued to identify himself with Harry, but Harry was now a man not a boy. The hero is as stately as Sir Charles Grandison, he told his mother a handsome likeness of an ugly son of yours.<sup>40</sup> Lady Castlewood he thought of no longer as Mrs Carmichael-Smyth but as Mrs Brookfield. And if bluff lazy amiable Lord Castlewood does not closely resemble Brookfield in character he is Brookfield's counterpart as a husband. So it was that Thackeray came to tell the poignant story of the bankruptcy of love at Castlewood Hall.<sup>41</sup> Despite its setting a hundred and fifty years earlier the first book of *Edmond* details a case history of Victorian domestic tyranny that might appropriately have been cited by John Stuart Mill in an appendix to his essay on *The Subjection of Women*.

After a two years absence at Cambridge Harry returns to Castlewood to witness an

actual tragedy of life, which absorbed and interested him more than all his tutor taught him. The persons whom he loved best in the world, and to whom he owed most, were living unhappily together. The gentlest and kindest of women was suffering ill-usage and shedding tears in secret: the man who made her wretched by neglect if not by violence, was Harry's benefactor and patron.<sup>42</sup>

He traces the steps by which this sad situation has come into being. During his absence Lady Castlewood

had oldened as people do who suffer silently great mental pain and learned much that she had never suspected before. She was taught by that bitter teacher Misfortune. A child, the mother of other children, but two years back her lord was a god to her his words her law his smile her sunshine his lax commonplaces listened to eagerly as if they were words of wisdom—all his wishes and freaks obeyed with a servile devotion. She had been my lord's chief slave and blind worshipper.<sup>43</sup>

But when Lord Castlewood added unfaithfulness to neglect

Her spirit rebelled and disowned any more obedience. First she had to bear in secret the passion of losing the adored object then to get a farther initiation, and find this worshipped being was but a clumsy idol; then to admit the silent truth, that it was she was superior and not the monarch her master that she had thoughts which his brains could never master and was the better of the two quite separate from my lord although tied to him, and bound as almost all people (save a very happy few) to work all her life alone.<sup>44</sup>

Nor was Lord Castlewood any happier than his wife. It was a torment to him to understand

that the woman who does his bidding, and submits to his humour should be his lord; that she can think a thousand things beyond the power of his muddled brains; and that in yonder head, on the pillow opposite to him, lie a thousand feelings, mysteries of thought, latent acorns and rebellions, whereof he only dimly perceives the existence as they look out furtively from her eyes. So the

lamp was out in Castlowood Hall, and the lord and lady there saw each other as they were <sup>45</sup>

Inevitably the household was an unhappy one. Husband and wife could not be together without friction.

It was my lord's custom to fling out many jokes in the presence of his wife and children, at meals—clumsy sarcasms which my lady turned many a time, or which, sometimes, she affected not to hear, or which now and again would hit their mark and make the poor victim wince (as you could see by her flushing face and eyes filling with tears), or which again worked her up to anger and retort, when, in answer to one of these heavy bolts, she would flash back with a quivering reply <sup>46</sup>

"So," Thackeray concludes, "into the sad secret of his patron's household Harry Esmond became initiated, he scarce knew how. One of the deepest sorrows of a life which had never, in truth, been very happy, came upon him now, when he was compelled to understand and pity a grief which he stood quite powerless to relieve" <sup>47</sup>

## VI

Harry's presence at Castlewood is, of course, precisely the complicating factor that Thackeray's had been in the Brookfields' household. In transferring his relationship with Mrs. Brookfield to his novel, however, Thackeray made one crucial alteration. La Rochefoucauld says that in every love affair there is "*celui qui aime, et celui qui se laisse aimer*." In *Esmond* it is Lady Castlewood who loves, and Harry who allows himself to be loved. Remembering that Thackeray both praised and reproached Mrs. Brookfield at the time of their separation, that he was at once tender and angry with her, we can comprehend how this reversal of roles in his novel helped to assuage his wounded vanity and satisfy his ambivalent feelings.

Lady Castlewood has long been recognized as the most complex of Thackeray's characters. The reader sees her entirely through Harry's eyes; he is never admitted to her mind. As a result, her conduct sometimes seems difficult to interpret with certainty. But once it is understood that she falls in love with Harry very early in the novel, at a time, indeed, when she is twenty-four and he sixteen, most difficulties of interpretation disappear. And Thackeray surely makes this point sufficiently plain, for only on the assumption that she is passionately jealous can one explain her cruel and insulting words to Harry when she discovers his fondness for the pretty daughter of a local blacksmith, a fondness that is the means of bringing into the family the smallpox raging

in the village near by.<sup>48</sup> It is equally evident that she has by this time ceased to care for her husband.<sup>49</sup> I don't make my good women ready to fall in love with two men at once. Thackeray remarked when he read Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* published a few months after *Esmond*.<sup>50</sup>

But Lady Castlewood is a woman of rigid principle. Conscious that she has come to love Harry she treats him with cold reserve until she thinks that her feelings are again under her control. She even tries briefly to win back her husband's wandering affection though here she perhaps acts from her keen sense of duty rather than from the need for his love that had formerly moved her. Met by rebuffs she does not persist and as the years pass her husband becomes restive at her coolness. She scorns me and holds her tongue. She keeps off from me as if I was a pestilence, he tells Harry. I believe she would be glad if I was dead and dead I've been to her these five years—ever since you all of you had the small pox.<sup>51</sup> These words lead Harry to act as Lord Castlewood's advocate with his Lady. Under the stress of this ironical situation—the man she loves pleading the case of the man she has ceased to love—Lady Castlewood's control falters and she once more assails Harry with unreasonable reproofs. Not understanding what it is that moves her Harry cries Great Heavens madam what have I done that thus for a second time you insult me? What wrong have I done you that you should wound me so cruel woman?

What wrong? she said, looking at Esmond with wild eyes. Well none—none that you know of Harry or could help. Why did you bring back the small pox, she added, after a pause, from Castlewood village? You could not help it, could you? Which of us knows whither fate leads us? But we were all happy Henry till then.<sup>52</sup>

Even these words fail to enlighten Harry.

Lord Castlewood's tragedy moves swiftly to its climax. Tormented by a dozen causes for remorse he seeks out a duel which he could easily have avoided and when it ends fatally for him he is not sorry. Harry too is hurt in the encounter. Lady Castlewood visits him as he lies in prison recovering from his wound and for the third time overwhelms him with passionate undeserved upbraidings.<sup>53</sup>

Why did you come among us? [she asks] You have only brought us grief and sorrow; and repentance, bitter bitter repentance as a return for our love and kindness. And you pretended to love us, and we believed you—and you made our house wretched, and my husband's heart went from me: and I

lost him through you—I lost him—the husband of my youth, I say I worshipped him you know I worshipped him—and he was changed to me He was no more my Francis of old—my dear, dear soldier He loved me before he saw you, and I loved him, oh, God is my witness how I loved him! Why did he not send you from among us? As the Lady Castlewood spoke bitterly, rapidly, without a tear [Thackeray continues], [Harry] never offered a word of appeal or remonstrance, but sat at the foot of his prison-bed, stricken only with the more pain at thinking it was that soft and beloved hand which should stab him so cruelly, and powerless against her fatal sorrow Her words as she spoke struck the chords of all his memory, and the whole of his boyhood and youth passed within him, whilst this lady, so fond and gentle but yesterday—this good angel whom he had loved and worshipped—stood before him, pursuing him with keen words and aspect malign <sup>54</sup>

Harry still does not comprehend that Lady Castlewood's reproaches arise from her remorse at having come to love him rather than her husband She feels that she must punish herself for her dereliction of duty, and to do so she has to achieve a state of mind in which she can bring herself to effect a separation from him Yet, as we shall see, she cannot leave Harry without taking a token with her

This scene clearly stems from Thackeray's encounters with Mrs Brookfield in September, 1851, in which, under the pressure of her husband's jealous demands, she behaved to him so unreasonably and cruelly that Thackeray for a time regarded her as a "traitress" <sup>55</sup> Her reproaches on this occasion must have followed the same pattern as those which Lady Castlewood heaps on Harry, and Thackeray liked to assume that Mrs Brookfield had insisted on a separation because she too placed duty above love Certainly he expresses his own feelings when he records Harry's pride in acquiescing in the break

no man knows his strength or his weakness, till occasion proves them If there be some thoughts and actions of his life from the memory of which a man shrinks with shame, sure there are some which he may be proud to own and remember, forgiven injuries, conquered temptations (now and then), and difficulties vanquished by endurance <sup>56</sup>

The period that Harry spends in prison recovering from his wound corresponds to the months in Thackeray's life following the quarrel in which he had lost Mrs Brookfield It was during this time that he put his experience into his book and thereby came to terms with it By the end of the first chapter of book two, Harry—and surely he speaks for Thackeray—is at last able to regard calmly the "dark months of grief and rage! of wrong and cruel endurance!" that lie behind him

At certain periods of life we live years of emotion in a few weeks—and look back on those times, as on great gaps between the old life and the new You

do not know how much you suffer in those critical maladies of the heart, until the disease is over and you look back on it afterwards. During the time, the suffering is at least sufferable. The day passes in more or less of pain, and the night wears away somehow. 'Tis only in after-days that we see what the danger has been—as a man out a-hunting or riding for his life looks at a leap, and wonders how he should have survived the taking of it.”

## VII

With the second chapter of the second book *Esmond* ceases to be the record of Thackeray's past history. But there is a return to the stormy region of longing passion unfulfilled<sup>55</sup> in Harry's later meetings with Lady Castlewood. Here Thackeray envisions what might have happened between him and Mrs. Brookfield in other circumstances. The account of Harry's first encounter with Lady Castlewood after his return from the wars in the famous chapter The 29th December is a fantasy of wish fulfilment—a picture of the sort of reunion that Thackeray was never to enjoy with Mrs. Brookfield.

I knew you would come back, [Lady Castlewood said] And to-day Henry in the anthem, when they sang it. When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream,” I thought, you, like them that dream—them that dream. And then it went “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy and he that goeth forth and weepeth, shall doubtless come home again with rejoicing bringing his sheaves with him. I looked up from the book, and saw you. I was not surprised when I saw you. I knew you would come, my dear and saw the gold sunshine round your head.

Do you know what day it is? she continued. It is the 29th of December—it is your birthday! But last year we did not drink it—no, no. My lord was cold, and my Harry was likely to die—and my brain was in a fever; and we had no wine. But now—now you are come again, bringing your sheaves with you, my dear.

As he had sometimes felt, gazing up from the deck at midnight into the boundless starlit depths overhead, in a rapture of devout wonder at that endless brightness and beauty—in some such way as now the depth of this pure devotion (which was, for the first time, revealed to him quite) smote upon him, and filled his heart with thanksgiving. Gracious God, who was he, weak and friendless creature, that such a love should be poured out upon him? Not in vain, not in vain has he lived—hard and thankless should he be to think so—that has such a treasure given him. What is ambition compared to that? but selfish vanity.

Only true love lives after you—follows your memory with secret blessing—or precedes you, and intercedes for you. *Non omnis morior*—if dying, I yet live in a tender heart or two; nor am lost and hopeless living, if a sainted departed soul still loves and prays for me.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the evidence of continued devotion which this passage provides—and the latter part of it can be paralleled almost word for word in one of Thackeray's letters to Mrs. Brookfield,<sup>56</sup> Thackeray still felt an obscure resentment against her for having so readily discarded him. So Harry is made to fall in love with Beatrix, who has grown to young womanhood during his absence.



and Lady Castlewood has to suffer the prolonged ordeal of witnessing, nay, of being made the confidante, of Harry's love for her own daughter. Only after fifteen years of this penance, does Thackeray finally unite her with Harry—who even then is moved more by devotion and pity than by love—and send the pair off to Virginia to enjoy the autumn of life together. The last sentence of the novel is a reminder of Lady Castlewood's constant fidelity to Harry

The only jewel by which my wife sets any store [he writes], and from which she hath never parted, is that gold button she took from my arm on the day when she visited me in prison, and which she wore ever after, as she told me, on the tenderest heart in the world <sup>61</sup>

Some time after the novel was published a French friend objected to Thackeray's dedication of *Esmond* to Lord Ashburton as snobbish. Thackeray thus explained it to him: "I am indebted to Lord and Lady Ashburton for the very greatest kindness at a period of the deepest grief and calamity. They knew very well the meaning of that dedication. I have said somewhere it is the unwritten part of books that would be the most interesting" <sup>62</sup> I have described the "unwritten part" of *Esmond*, endeavoring to show how the novel seems to reply, when closely interrogated regarding its relation to Thackeray's personal history

Look in my face, my name is Might-have-been,  
I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell <sup>63</sup>

This connection has more than an incidental interest, it provides, as I have also tried to demonstrate, the clue to the proper interpretation of a puzzling book. We understand why Thackeray thought George Brimley's *Spectator* review of *Esmond* the best of the many that appeared, for Brimley was almost alone in asserting Lady Castlewood's primary importance in the novel. "The record of Colonel Esmond's life," he wrote, "is throughout a record of his attachment to one woman" <sup>64</sup> We also comprehend the significance of Thackeray's reply to Mrs. John Brown, when that lady, regarding Beatrix as the novel's proper heroine, asked him: "Why did you make Esmond marry that old woman?" "My dear lady," was his answer, "it was not I who married them. They married themselves" <sup>65</sup>

## VIII

The supreme success with which Thackeray turned his personal history to account in *Esmond* may be illustrated by comparing

with the personal element in that novel his earlier attempt to make literary use of his relationship with Mrs Brookfield in *Pendennis*. This occurs in the Fanny Bolton episode already considered in chapter four which has always been a stumbling block in Thackeray's fiction even to his convinced admirers.

On February twenty-sixth 1850 Mrs. Brookfield gave birth to her first child whom her husband with even more than usually perverse disregard of conventional prejudice insisted on christening Magdalene. Thackeray was much moved by this event. How curious it will be to see you realizing your nine years dream at last he wrote with that dear little baby for your constant thought and occupation! I feel like an old woman in thinking about you and talk as such. "When he called to make inquiries about her convalescence however he found the door shut to him. Word was brought that Brookfield wished entire privacy and desired him to remain away from the house.

Profoundly hurt Thackeray left at once for Paris. He did not hold Mrs Brookfield responsible for what had happened. Indeed he wrote to assure her that his allegiance was quite unshaken. Don't fancy that I am come here to forget you quite the reverse—the chain pulls tighter the farther I am away from you and I don't want to break it or to be other than my dear sister's most faithful Makepeace to command. "Yet he was angry and resentful. While trying to get his wounds healed he meditated on the unsatisfactory nature of a relationship liable to abrupt cessation at Brookfield's caprice. The occasion was one of many on which he told himself in the words of a later letter

Very likely 'tis a woman I want more than any particular one: and some day may be investing a trull in the street with that priceless jewel my heart—It is written that a man should have a mate above all things. The want of this natural outlet plays the deuce with me. Why can't I fancy some honest woman to be a titular Mrs. Tomkins? "

In this condition of mind he began the current number of *Pendennis* in which Mrs. Brookfield already figured in the person of his heroine Laura Bell. He contrived an accidental meeting at Vauxhall between his hero forgetful of Laura as he idled in London, and Fanny Bolton the pretty daughter of a Shepherd's Inn porter a young woman with a great deal of dangerous and rather contagious sensibility who has heated her little brain with novels until her whole thoughts are of love and lovers. "A mutual infatuation results and Thackeray's monthly part

ends with its issue seemingly in doubt "I wonder what will happen with Pendennis and Fanny Bolton," he wrote to Mrs Brookfield "Writing it and sending it to you somehow it seems as if it were true"<sup>70</sup>

Though Thackeray could not resist teasing Mrs Brookfield, and though he notes in his preface that "subscribers left me, because in the course of the story, I described a young man resisting and affected by temptation,"<sup>71</sup> there was no danger that Fanny would come to harm In 1850 the treatment of illicit love in English popular literature was controlled by rigid conventions The influence of women in society was thought to depend primarily on their technical purity, and a seduction in a play or a novel was followed summarily by the death or banishment of the woman and the condign punishment of the man This is the pattern that Dickens adopts, for example, in the episode of little Em'ly and Steerforth in *David Copperfield*, a novel which appeared concurrently with *Pendennis* But Steerforth was a secondary character who could be killed after his transgression, while Pen was Thackeray's hero So he was careful to introduce Sam Huxter, Fanny's destined husband, in the very chapter where she meets Pen And he was forced to pretend that nothing happens between Pen and Fanny, neither a plausible nor an exciting development

Thackeray apologized for his tepid handling of this episode, which should properly have been one of the climaxes of his novel, in a famous passage of his preface "Since the Author of 'Tom Jones' was buried," he contended, "no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a MAN"<sup>72</sup> It is not surprising that Henry James should choose this part of *Pendennis* to support the comment that "The sentimental habit and the spirit of romance, it was unmistakably chargeable, stood out to sea as far as possible the moment the shore [of the real] appeared to offer the least difficulty to hugging, and the Victorian age bristled with perfect occasions for our catching them in the act of this showy retreat"<sup>73</sup>

Yet even given a free hand, it is unlikely that Thackeray would have been able to persuade his readers that Pen was really tempted So tightly did Mrs Brookfield's chain bind him at this time that even his fictional rendering of the alternative to his relationship with her was half-hearted and unconvincing The character of Laura fails, just as does the Fanny Bolton episode, because Thackeray in neither case achieves a perspective that allows the proper assimilation of life to art An example of the point may

be cited. Laura shows her jealousy of Fanny when the two meet during Pen's illness by treating her with extreme scorn and severity. That Thackeray had accurately gauged Mrs Brookfield's response to such a situation is shown in her comment on these chapters. I liked a *great deal* of this June number but cannot help being sorry you dignify the F. B. fancy with the name of love—it seems degrading the word to apply it to the dear little girl who drops her H's. Yet this deficiency in Mrs Brookfield which is faithfully reproduced in Laura does not prevent Thackeray from presenting the latter as an ideal heroine. The result is not happy.

A novel must contain at least one *magnetic* character [writes Elizabeth Bowen] at least one character capable of keying the reader up as though he (the reader) were in the presence of someone he is in love with. The unfortunate case is, where the character has obviously acted magnetically upon the author but fails to do so upon the reader.

On Thackeray and his contemporaries Laura did act magnetically. But she leaves modern readers cold and we find Thackeray's raptures over her merely embarrassing.

Lady Castlewood in *Esmond* and Thackeray's picture of Harry's relationship with her though he is drawing on the same experience that suggested Laura and the Fanny Bolton episode in *Pendennis* are a very different matter. In *Esmond* he has written *finis* to the Brookfield affair though it remains fresh in his mind. He sees its whole meaning clearly without ceasing to feel it deeply. The result is a narrative marked equally by detachment and penetration. The chapters detailing Harry's connection with Lord and Lady Castlewood are perhaps the most moving in all of Thackeray's fiction. And in his portrait of Lady Castlewood Thackeray displays at once the firm consistency of judgment with which he drew Joe Sedley, Miss Crawley, and Major Pendennis and the sympathetic understanding of the profounder levels of personality that gives value to his pictures of Amelia and Mrs Pendennis.

## IX

When *Esmond* appeared, its first readers were chiefly impressed by precisely that part of the novel which derived from the Brookfield affair. Thackeray noted with sardonic amusement that the pages most often quoted in early reviews were those in which he had described Brookfield's neglect of his wife. How mad poor Tomkins must be at the press selecting those passages he

wrote "He will treat her better after though"<sup>76</sup> Despite its historical setting, Thackeray's contemporaries recognized in the book a supreme example of the domestic novel, the dominant variety of fiction in the eighteen-fifties. Nor did they fail to discern its modernity of feeling. Its men and women were those they saw about them in Victorian England, "the springs of pity in them deepened," as Pater was afterwards to remark, "by the deeper subjectivity, the intenser and closer living with itself, which is characteristic of the temper of the later generation"<sup>77</sup>

But as the domestic novel fell out of fashion in the eighteen-seventies and eighteen-eighties, a different view came to be taken of *Esmond*. In the heyday of Stevensonian romance, its historical elements were emphasized, it was regarded as a supreme adventure story. Such scenes as Lord Castlemore's duel with Lord Mohun, the encounter between Marlborough and General Webb at the dinner after Wynandael, Harry's rebuke of the Duke of Hamilton, and Harry's pursuit of and mock duel with the Pretender were conceived to be the novel's climaxes. And the figure who had aroused repulsion and disgust among many mid-Victorian readers was acclaimed by George Saintsbury in 1895 as "the incomparable character of Beatrice Esmond, the one complete woman of English prose fiction"<sup>78</sup>

Clearly *Esmond* makes high claims both as a domestic novel and as a romance. Since historical fiction has fallen into disrepute with serious modern readers, written as it is chiefly by popular entertainers who have turned its production into a major industry, we shall perhaps do well to regard *Esmond* once more as above all a chronicle of thirty-five years of life in a narrow family circle, to center our attention on its analysis of the shifting relationships of Lord and Lady Castlemore, Harry, and Beatrice. Acquainted as we are with the background of *Esmond* in Thackeray's personal history, we can do this in the confident knowledge that its author conceived it primarily as a domestic drama.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE NEWCOMES

#### I

In *The Newcomes* Thackeray returned permanently to the mode of writing that he had followed in *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis*. *Esmond* had met with a mixed reception. At first it had great success with public and critics alike. Then three months after its appearance Thackeray's old enemy Samuel Phillips published a slashing review of it in the *Times*. Following his lead critics generally began to complain of its slowness of pace, its melancholy tone, and the unpleasant nature of its love story. Thackeray came to feel that the pains he had taken with the book were wasted on the sort of readers he had to please, and he determined in the future to write to be popular. Not long after he began *The Newcomes* he noted

It goes pretty well: like the other yellow books—not so high toned or so carefully finished as *Esmond* but that you see was a failure besides being immoral. We must take pains and write careful books when we have made the 10000 for the young ladies.<sup>1</sup>

At first Thackeray was despondent about his ability to recapture the great public even under the easy conditions of serial publication which permitted him to rely on his old facility as an improviser. It would be very well if the other books had not preceded, he wrote, but it is not an advance on them, and a retreat from the high ground occupied in *Esmond*.<sup>2</sup>

I can't but see it is a repetition of past performances and think that vein is pretty high worked out in me.<sup>3</sup> It seems to me I am too old for story telling.<sup>4</sup>

But as he continued to write his confidence in his powers returned. He became sufficiently sure of himself to adhere to his initial plan of establishing each branch of the Newcome family with great elaboration even in the face of agitated complaints from his publishers that his story did not move. By the time his novel was completed his assurance had entirely returned and he was eager to embark upon another novel in the same vein.

As Thackeray's richest and most comprehensive panorama of English life, *The Newcomes* would seem to afford ample warrant for its author's confidence. Yet it is read today far less often than *Vanity Fair*, *Esmond*, or even *Pendennis*. Modern readers are apt to find it "in Elizabeth Bowen's phrase, the shell of a great novel" because it lacks a focus of interest sufficient to keep their attention constantly engaged. For Thackeray's contemporaries this focus was provided by the character of Colonel Newcome. Since he, more than any other figure in Thackeray's novels, has suffered from the shift from Victorian to modern taste, it will be particularly enlightening to consider him in terms of his relation to Thackeray's personal history.

While he was writing the last chapters of *The Newcomes* Thackeray met in Paris an American lady with whom he had formed a friendship during his first American lecture tour three years earlier. This was Mrs. George B. Jones, who sent to her sister the following account of their conversation:

Mr. Thackeray was very interesting and inclined to be confidential about his heart trouble. I told me a great deal about the *Newcomes* and where he drew his characters. Old Col. Newcome is his step-father—a simple honest old bore who ruined them all by his foolish interference with the most innocent man in the world. I read the first letter of Melancthon de Horne. He spoke of it fearfully and said there was more in it than met the eye. He alluded feelingly to his wife and I should judge he had arrived at that stage of calm despair when one is left almost without religion or hope. He loved another, but seals in the rigid discharge of his duty to his family to shut out the dangerous contemplation of what might be his happiness. He has been one can see a thoroughly disappointed man.

Passing by the evidence this letter affords of Thackeray's continuing love for Mrs. Brookfield and the imprint that it left on his work long after his break with her, let us turn our attention to Colonel Newcome and his "original."

## II

Henry William Carmichael-Smyth was one of the eight sons of the London physician James Carmichael-Smyth.<sup>7</sup> The Carmichaels were an old and distinguished Scottish family, related to the Earls of Hyndford, whose lineage can be traced back to the fourteenth century. Dr. James Carmichael added Smyth to his surname when he succeeded to the estate of Aithernie in Fife on the death of Dr. James Smyth, his maternal grandfather. After a Gretna Green marriage with an heiress in 1775, he embarked on a brilliant medical career in London, conducting valuable experiments in the control of contagious diseases for

which parliament voted him the sum of £5 000 winning election as a Fellow of the Royal Society and serving as Physician Extraordinary to George the Third

Dr Carmichael-Smyth's influential connections enabled him to place all of his eight male children in the army or the East India Company's civil service. The career of his oldest son was even more successful than his own. Commissioned in the Royal Engineers in 1794 James Carmichael-Smyth ultimately attained the rank of Major-General and the colonelcy of his regiment. His most notable military services were rendered in 1814 and 1815 when he planned the attack on Bergen-op-Zoom, and acted as commanding royal engineer on the staff of the Duke of Wellington at Quatre Bras and Waterloo. For these services he was created a baronet in 1821. In later life he was sent on military missions to the West Indies and Canada and acted as Governor of the Bahama Islands and British Guiana. He died in the latter office during 1838.

Sir James's brothers all had careers of some distinction two of them rising to be Generals in the Indian army and one becoming a Judge of the Supreme Court in Calcutta. Only William Carmichael-Smyth caused the family serious embarrassment. After some years in the Bengal civil service he returned to England and was made a Paymaster of Exchequer Bills through his brother's interest. He fulfilled the duties of this office competently for thirteen years but after his marriage in 1822 his conduct became very peculiar and in 1824 his superiors found it necessary to dismiss him. He quarrelled with his wife who had been a Miss Bayford drove her from his house and caused circulars entitled *Caution to the Public* to be distributed in which tradespeople were warned against giving her credit. When her brothers brought suit on her behalf William issued a circular attacking his *graceless* Bunch of Rue and her relatives which he entitled

*A Bitter Pill for Uncivil Civilians???*

*"Bray forth Bayford beware of the day  
When Carmichael shall meet thee in battle array*

*In the Consistory Court of London*

*Smyth v Smyth*

*Nemo v Homo*

His later years were spent in the compilation of crazy memorials defending his public and private conduct \* but he never regained his lost office and reputation



There seems, indeed, to have been a touch of eccentricity about all of the Carmichael-Smyths, a fanatical obstinacy in pursuing unconventional lines of conduct that took various forms. Sir James had an almost maniacal devotion to military discipline which made him most unpopular among the Royal Engineers. At his country house of Nutwood in Surrey all meals and other calls were sounded on the bugle. His younger brothers used to amuse themselves while visiting him with a sport that they called "pelting the elods," which consisted of throwing rocks at local farmers until a fight resulted. On one occasion two of the brothers masked themselves and held up the carriage of a younger brother returning from Eton, but the younger brother defended himself fiercely and got away without yielding his purse to the supposed highway robbers. Robert Carmichael-Smyth was involved with Lord Cardigan in the notorious "Black Bottle" row of 1840, an aftermath of which led him into a duel with Captain Tucker at the Cape of Good Hope. Mark Wood Carmichael-Smyth became a Plymouth Brother in later life and annoyed his family by announcing his determination to give away all his possessions as an encouragement to people generally to share everything in common. Stranger still was the behaviour of General Charles Carmichael after his retirement from the army and settlement in London. He was "very liberal," we are told,<sup>10</sup> "but had a habit of saving bits left at the table, putting them aside, and forgetting all about them." He called his modest residence on the Brompton Road, Hyndford House—the earldom of Hyndford having become dormant some years earlier—and used to say grandly to cabbies, "Drive me to Hyndford House." Charles's relatives record with relish the remark that a cabbie was heard to make to a mate on one of these occasions: "Blow me, Bill, where's this 'ere 'Yndford 'Ouse?" Life at Hyndford House was punctuated by daily religious services, to which Charles used to call the housemaids by going to the head of the basement stairs and crying "Come up, come up, ye pious virgins, and pray."

Despite their eccentricities, however, the Carmichael-Smyths rank high among the many energetic and ambitious Scottish families that left their mark on nineteenth century English life. They were sometimes devoted to learning (both Dr James and Sir James wrote valuable books on technical subjects, and even poor William's pamphlets testify to considerable erudition), sometimes to the roughest and crudest practical jokes, they served the public with complete integrity, yet without shifting

their gaze from the main chance. They all lived busy active lives, their outlook was usually simple and practical in the extreme, and however strange their personal peculiarities might be, they remained gentlemen, proud of their lineage and position, who governed themselves by strict notions of honor and *noblesse oblige*.

### III

Henry Carmichael-Smyth was Dr. James's second son. The boy was born in 1780 and educated at Charterhouse school.<sup>11</sup> Early in 1797 he joined the Indian army with a commission as Ensign of engineers. It was six years before he saw action, the intervening period being passed chiefly as Assistant Engineer at Allahabad, but in 1803 he joined Lord Lake's army with the rank of Lieutenant. During the second Maratha War he was present at the storm and capture of Aligarh, the battle of Delhi, and the battle of Laswari in 1803, the taking of Rampura, and the battle and capture of Dieg in 1804, and the siege of Bhurtpore in 1805. His work at Dieg led Lord Lake to mention his peculiar merit in a dispatch to the Marquess Wellesley, and he later received the India Medal for his services at Bhurtpore. In 1806 he participated in the operations against the Rana of Gohad and was present at the capture of Gohad Fort. Even when he was not in the field his life was hazardous enough. 'He went out to dinner one night, family records relate, with only his sword on—they always went armed—when he was attacked by robbers. He killed one, wounded another, and the third ran away.

Lieutenant Carmichael-Smyth returned to England in October 1807 on a medical certificate. He met Anne Becher while visiting Bath during the following year. He was then twenty-seven and she fifteen. Their courtship followed the pattern of Othello's, and he might have said, as did the Moor of Deademona,

She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd  
And I lov'd her that she did pity them.

But Anne's grandmother did not intend that her lovely charge should marry a younger son of uncertain prospects, and she refused to permit their engagement. Henry followed Anne back to her home at Farham. What there occurred is related by Mrs. Fuller, Anne's great-granddaughter:

Their secret trysting place was a terrace at the end of the Bechers' garden, past which flowed the broad tidal river which skirts the town. Here Anne

was accustomed to wait for the boat that brought her lover. But their meetings were discovered, and Anne was ordered to her room, where she was kept under lock and key until she would give her word of honour that she would not again see Ensign [actually Lieutenant] Carmichael Smyth. With this order she refused to comply, and she was supported in her confinement by the letters which the Ensign managed to smuggle to her by a maid, and to which she replied by the same agent.

Then suddenly the letters ceased, and one day old Mrs. Becher hobbled into her granddaughter's room and told her to muster all her courage to bear a great blow, the Ensign had died of a sudden fever and on his death bed had sent her messages of his undying love. Anne pined and mourned in silence. After a time a family council decided that the broken hearted young woman should be sent out to India as soon as possible.<sup>12</sup>

Anne accordingly returned to Calcutta with her mother, Mrs. Butler, in the spring of the following year. Henry's leave terminated in June of 1810, and by December of that year he too was again in India. He was now a Captain and held the important post of Garrison Engineer at Agra. In March, 1811, he embarked with an expedition to Java. There he participated in the action at Weltevreden and in the reduction of the fortified lines at Cornelis in August. After the surrender of the island in September, he and the other officers received medals from the Prince Regent for their parts in the campaign. In February of the following year he was employed as Field Engineer in the reduction of Kalinjar Fort. A proclamation of the Governor-General in Council of March, 1812, refers to "the exemplary valour displayed by Capt. Smyth, the directing engineer, on the morning of the 2d ult."

Before resuming his duties as Garrison Engineer at Agra, Captain Carmichael-Smyth spent some time in Calcutta. There he met Richmond Thackeray, who invited him home one night for dinner. Thus he and Anne Becher, now Mrs. Thackeray, were brought together abruptly and without warning. After dinner an explanation occurred. Mrs. Thackeray had been told that her lover had died from a sudden fever. Captain Carmichael-Smyth had been informed by Mrs. Becher that Anne no longer cared for him and had broken their engagement, all his letters had been returned to him unopened. He had much to consider when he departed soon thereafter for Agra. Though he knew that he was still loved, it seemed unlikely that he and Anne would ever be united.

Three years later, however, Richmond Thackeray died. His widow did not return to England with her son, because she had determined to marry Captain Carmichael-Smyth as soon as she decently could. Their wedding took place on 13 March 1817,<sup>13</sup> a year and a half to the day after Richmond Thackeray's death.

The Carmichael-Smyths then settled down together in Agra for three years. When they returned to England early in 1820 the Captain had completed twenty years of distinguished service in India.

Like most returned Anglo Indians the Carmichael-Smyths were disappointed in their mother-country. Three months after her arrival Anne wrote to Mrs Butler in India

England is very delightful the climate fine the Country Paradise but the people! the people are not Indians, they live for themselves, we live for our friends & I don't think in a whole life I should ever make such a friend as a few months in your kinder land has given me <sup>14</sup>

Nor was the reserve of the English all that Anne had to complain of. The secret is she wrote we live in India as people in this Country do who now spend £3000 a year and then come home to live upon one <sup>15</sup>. It is more for Henry than herself her sister Maria explained. He of course would feel some degree of mortification to see his Elder Brother living in a style of splendor and himself limited as he must be in almost all his wishes <sup>16</sup>.

Not that there was any failure in hospitality on the part of Henry's father. Dr James Carmichael-Smyth at once invited the couple to make their home at the old Chateau as he called his country house at Charlton a few miles outside of London. He made Anne quite mistress of the house <sup>17</sup>— he had long been a widower— and would take nothing from them towards the expenses of the establishment. Anne was delighted with him. The good old Father is exactly what I expected she wrote full of good humour firm spirits his conversation replete with elegant wit & strong sense <sup>18</sup>.

Anne and Henry continued to make the Chateau their home until the death of Dr Carmichael-Smyth in 1821. It meant a great deal to Henry to have this year at Charlton. His poor Father has often told me Anne wrote Harry is my only child who never did a thing that I could have wished done otherwise. I believe there is not a happier Father in the world than I am but impartial as my feelings are & proud as I am of them all there is not one whom I can compare to Harry <sup>19</sup>. Though only a second son Henry's financial position was considerably improved by his father's death and when he received his majority and a consequent increase in half pay later in 1821 it came to seem less essential that he return to India as he had originally planned.

## IV

For two years Major Carmichael-Smyth served as Superintendent of the East India Company's Military Seminary at Addiscombe. Then he retired from the army and settled with his wife at Larkbeare House, near Ottery St Mary in Devon. It was during these years that Thackeray became intimately acquainted with his stepfather. Major Carmichael-Smyth was a small, spare, erect man, solemn and reserved. His simplicity and candor, his freedom from personal vanity (he would never talk about his military exploits), and his natural kindness and dignity made him a model of gentlemanliness to the boy. And so he was to remain in Thackeray's eyes. "I have never seen finer gentlefolks than you two," Thackeray told his mother after he came to know London society well many years later.<sup>20</sup>

Though the Major commanded Thackeray's respect and admiration from the first, the two were hardly congenial in taste or temperament. Major Carmichael-Smyth was by no means of a literary turn. His ponderous and sober intelligence leaned rather towards such matter as the reports of parliamentary debates, concerning which, as an extreme radical, he took strong views. Family tradition records that after his removal to France a few years later, he underlined his resolute John Bullishness and his contempt for the Napoleonic tradition by walking the streets of Paris with a little dog which he christened "Waterloo" and continually called to heel by that name. Yet disparate as they were, Thackeray and the Major for many years got along well enough, and the man's stolid manliness no doubt helped to prevent the boy from becoming the "muff and milksop" that maternal dominance made of Ruskin.<sup>21</sup>

Even so, their relationship did not remain entirely unaffected by the overcharged emotional atmosphere that clung round Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth's passionate personality. His wife's first marriage had left the Major with an uneasy jealousy which he could never altogether suppress. He was absorbed in his wife, he treated her with great deference, he faithfully adopted all of her enthusiasms without question or protest. For example, though he was himself in a state of rude health, he followed each of the regimens prescribed for the ailing Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth by a series of favorite doctors. Thackeray describes him in 1841 taking the water-cure with his wife, and goes on to comment

In the last twenty years he has been successively a convert to Abernethy's blue pills, of wh. he swallowed pounds—to Morison's ditto—wh. he flung in by

spoonfuls to St John Long to whom he paid 100 guineas for rubbing an immense sore on & then off his back, to Homoeopathy wh. put the nose of all other systems of medicine out of joint, and finally to Hydrocundopathy."

The Major could not avoid feeling some resentment at his wife's absorption in her son nor could Thackeray himself escape some sense of friction. There's something immodest in the marriage of an elderly woman with children he wrote many years afterwards. How disgusted I have felt at hearing my old GP snoring in my mother's room."

It devolved upon the Major to safeguard the family's financial welfare. A child in the world of affairs he failed to take proper advice in the Indian financial crises of 1833. In consequence most of Thackeray's fortune (nearly £12 000 it would appear) as well as a good part of his own was swept away in the failure of the Calcutta agency houses during that year. Seeking to compensate his stepson for his negligence and to recoup his own losses he three years later put most of his remaining resources into *The Constitutional* a new radical newspaper for which Thackeray acted as Paris correspondent. The paper failed a little more than five months after its first issue appeared. Their income further diminished by this second calamity Major Carmichael-Smyth and his wife withdrew to Paris where living was inexpensive and whither troublesome creditors could not follow them.

There the Major pursued fortune through inventions rather than investments. He was an indefatigable projector. His mind ran constantly on mechanical contrivances that were to make the family rich. He had a room full of chemical experiments barrels of beer bottles old German dictionaries and medical works" where family tradition tells us he designed a steam carriage that in some respects anticipated the automobile. The one invention concerning which detailed information has survived does not inspire confidence in his methods.

My granduncle (so Lady Ritchie calls the Major in her story "Across the Peat-Fields"), who was of an ingenious turn of mind, had come to Vley to try a machine he had invented, and to make experiments in the manufacture of peat-fuel. It is certain that with his machine and the help of an old woman and a boy he could produce as many little square blocks of firing in a day as M. Herard, the rival manufacturer in three with all his staff, including his cook and his carters son. It is true that our machine cost about 300*l.* to start with, and that it was constantly getting out of order and requiring the doctoring of a Paris engineer but setting this aside it was clear that a saving of 35 per cent. was effected by our process.

The engineer from Paris having failed us on two occasions, I believe that my granduncle had at one time serious thoughts of constructing a mechanical engineer

who was to keep the whole thing in order, and only to require an occasional poke himself to continue going<sup>25</sup>

Despite the reduced circumstances in which he and his wife were forced to live, despite the failure of his inventions, the Major was happy enough in his Parisian retirement. Lady Ritchie, who lived with the Carmichael-Smyths during most of the eighteen-forties, has left an engaging picture of the Major among his household gods

I don't think we ever came home from one of our walks [she writes] that we did not find our grandfather sitting watching for our grandmother's return. We used to ask him if he didn't find it very dull doing nothing in the twilight, but he used to tell us it was his thinking time. A good deal of thinking went on in our peaceful home, we should have liked more doing. One day was just like another, my grandmother and my grandfather sat on either side of the hearth in their two accustomed places, there was a French cook in a white cap, who brought in the trays and the lamp at the appointed hour. We lived in a sunny little flat on a fourth floor with the windows east and west and a wide horizon from each, and the sound of the cries from the street below, and the confusing roll of the wheels when the windows were open in the summer. In winter time we dined at five by lamplight at the round table in my grandfather's study. After dinner we used to go into the pretty blue drawing-room where the peat fire would be burning brightly in the open grate, and the evening papers would come in with the tea. On the band of the *Constitutional* newspaper was printed 'M le Major Michel Eschmid'. It was not my grandfather's name or anything like it, but he would gravely say that when English people lived in France they must expect to have their names gallicised, and his paper certainly found him out evening after evening. While my grandmother with much emphasis read the news (she was a fervent republican, and so was my grandfather), my sister and I would sit unconscious of politics and happy over our story books, until the fatal inevitable moment when a ring was heard at the bell and evening callers were announced.

The ladies would come in their bonnets, with their news and their comments upon the public events. Ours was a talkative, economical, and active little society,—*Cranford en Voyage* was the impression that remains to me of those early surroundings. If the ladies were one and all cordially attached to my grandmother, to my grandfather they were still more devoted. A Major is a Major. He used to sign their pension papers, administer globules for their colds, give point and support to their political opinions. I can see him still sitting in his armchair by the fire with a little semicircle round about the hearth<sup>26</sup>

After Thackeray's wife lost her mind in 1840, he was occasionally a part of this society, which he found even more irksome than did his girls. Expressions of annoyance at having to "drag about in this confounded little Pedlington"<sup>27</sup> dot his letters. He did not blame his mother for its dullness, but a tinge of acerbity began to color his references to his stepfather. "There is that stupid old Governor of mine," he told FitzGerald in 1841, "we are always on the point of quarreling, though we never do"<sup>28</sup> "He is a worthy man however," Thackeray

continued and indeed his exasperation with the Major never really clouded his admiration for him. Comparing his own sensitive and erratic nature with that of his stepfather he told his mother not long afterward

Depend upon it a good honest kindly man not cursed by a genius, that doesn't prate about his affections and cries very little, and loves his home—he is the real man to go through the world with. Look at G P and his steadiness of heart, with love for working-days as well as Sundays: how much superior that sort of enduring character and manliness is, to all our flashy touch-and-go theorizing about love. I feel respect and attachment for him.<sup>29</sup>

During the middle eighteen forties Thackeray on more than one occasion suggested to the Carmichael-Smyths that they return to London. After the success of *Lansky Fair* he paid off the Major's debts—GP is no longer a Robin Hood—he told his mother—in the hope that his stepfather might agree to leave France but Major Carmichael-Smyth would not budge. His jealous desire to be first in his wife's affections and his dislike of giving up the consideration he enjoyed in his little Parisian circle for an insignificant place in the household of his brilliant stepson were strong motives for remaining abroad.

Mrs Carmichael-Smyth longed to join her grandchildren in England and she found life with her elderly husband in increasingly difficult. In the year after he finished *The Newcomes* Thackeray sent Mrs Eliot the following account of her situation

My dear old folks keep me in endless perplexity—indeed when didn't they? It's small comfort I get out of the anxious loves jealousies glooms despondencies of that poor old Mother to whom we're always going and who is always miserable at parting from us, or in grief for one cause or another. That most faithful uxorious exacting old gentleman weighs down her life with his dullness—cares for no amusement but his fireside, and to talk stupid articles out of the newspaper doesn't like much talking or too many candles even in his room—keeps us all mum and dismal—I don't want to live to be 76, if 76 is to be no better fun than that. [It is] small fun—for us and for that poor old Bird who has paired with my maternal hen those forty years, and feels that he has no business in our nest at all. I fear actually for my mother's reason. Her nerves have broken right down. She is sleepless unless amused, and he won't let her be amused.<sup>30</sup>

Yet even so Thackeray's last word about his stepfather is not Superfluous lags the vet ran on the stage

You see what you do when you marry [he told his daughters]—what slaves you become—well? and what immense happiness you enjoy I daresay with the right man. These folks pleasure has no doubt been very greatly increased during 40 years by their living together—the bottom of the cup is rather bitter. So may other dregs be.<sup>31</sup>



## V

In transferring his stepfather from life to the pages of *The Newcomes* Thackeray provided a sufficiently faithful portrait.<sup>32</sup> We find him noting two years after the novel was finished that Major Carmichael-Smyth "grows to be more and more like Colonel Newcome every day."<sup>33</sup> But there is an element in Colonel Newcome missing from most of Thackeray's other portraits from life. His character is, as Thackeray remarked, *consciously* "angelicised."<sup>34</sup> This "angelising" took two forms. Major Carmichael-Smyth personified for Thackeray a kind of man for whom he had particular admiration. He saw in him what Ruskin speaks in *Praeterita* of seeing in his friend Major Edward Matson, "such a calm type of truth, gentleness, and simplicity, as I myself have found in soldiers or sailors only," a character who almost reconciled him "to the national guilt of war, seeing that such men were made by the discipline of it."<sup>35</sup> But Colonel Newcome is not merely an epitome of the military virtues, he also represents Thackeray's attempt to provide in his fiction a parallel to certain characters in earlier novels whom he had long admired, to such models of manly simplicity and ingenuousness as Don Quixote (he read through Cervantes' masterpiece while writing the early numbers of *The Newcomes*), Parson Adams, and Dr Primrose.

Due allowance made for this exceptional element of idealization the picture that Thackeray draws of Colonel Newcome in the first third of his novel is essentially that which he himself entertained of his stepfather during his own boyhood. The Colonel's history is similar to that of Major Carmichael-Smyth. It includes, for example, education at Grey Friars (that is, Charterhouse), a brief early love passage with a girl destined to a more eligible suitor, and a long career of distinguished service in the Indian army, during which he sees action in the battle of Laswari and the siege of Bhurtpore during the second Maratha War.<sup>36</sup>

When we first meet Colonel Newcome, he has returned to England after a thirty-five year absence. The leading aspects of his character are admirably displayed in the opening episode of the novel, which is surely one of the great scenes of English fiction. The Colonel has brought his boy Clive to the "Cave of Harmony," a London tavern which in his youth had been the haunt of "the wits," of Richard Brinsley Sheridan and of Professor Porson. During the third of a century since the Colonel last visited it, however, the "Cave of Harmony" has fallen

on evil days its clientele has become less select and its tone has coarsened. Yet out of deference to his unaccustomed visitors Hoskins the proprietor, is for a time able to suppress the dubious elements in his entertainment and the Colonel is entranced with what he finds.

I say Clive : [he says to his son] this is delightful I shall come here often. He became quite excited over his sherry-and water—( I'm sorry to see you, gentlemen, drinking brandy pawnee, says he. It plays the douce with our young men in India.) He joined in all the choruses with an exceedingly sweet voice. He laughed at the Derby Ram so that it did you good to hear him ; and when Hoskins sang (as he did admirably) the Old English Gentleman, and described in measured cadence, the death of that venerable aristocrat tears trickled down the honest warrior's cheek while he held out his hand to Hoskins and said, Thank you sir for that song ; it is an honour to human nature. On which Hoskins began to cry too."

Shortly thereafter the Colonel himself volunteers to sing Wapping Old Stairs much to the surprise of the assembled company and the embarrassment of his son.

He sang this quaint and charming old song [Thackeray tells us] in an exceedingly pleasant voice with flourishes and roulades in the old Italian manner which has pretty nearly passed away. The singer gave his heart and soul to the simple ballad, and delivered Molly's gentle appeal so pathetically that even the professional gentlemen hummed and buzzed a sincere applause and some wags who were inclined to jeer at the beginning of the performance clinked their glasses and rapped their sticks with quite a respectful enthusiasm. When the song was over Clive held up his head too after the shock of the first verse looked round with surprise and pleasure in his eyes and we need not say, backed our friend, delighted to see him come out of his queer scrape so triumphantly. The colonel bowed and smiled with very pleasant good nature at our plaudits. It was like Dr Primrose preaching his sermon in the prison. There was something touching in the naïveté and kindness of the placid and simple gentleman."

For a time it seems as though unaccustomed sweetness and light would prevail in the Cavo of Harmony throughout the evening. But as the Colonel finishes his song Captain Costigan a drunken habitué of the tavern rolls in. He is altogether beyond Hoskins's control and no sooner does he procure himself a glass of whisky and water than he begins one of his prime songs.

The unlucky wretch, who scarcely knew what he was doing or saying selected one of the most outrageous performances of his repertoire fired off a tipsy howl by way of overture and away he went. At the end of the second verse the colonel started up, clapping on his hat seizing his stick, and looking as ferocious as though he had been going to do battle with a Pindaroo. Silence ! he roared out. Hear ! hear ! cried certain wags at a farther table. Go on, Costigan ! said others.

Go on ! cries the colonel, in his high voice trembling with anger. Does any gentleman say Go on " ? Does any man who has a wife and sisters or children at home say Go on " to such disgusting ribaldry as this ? Do you

dare, sir, to call yourself a gentleman, and to say that you hold the king's commission, and to sit down amongst Christians and men of honour, and defile the ears of young boys with this wicked balderdash ?'

'Why do you bring young boys here, old boy ?' cries a voice of the malcontents. 'Why ? Because I thought I was coming to a society of gentlemen,' cried out the indignant colonel. 'Because I never could have believed that Englishmen could meet together and allow a man, and an old man, so to disgrace himself. For shame, you old wretch ! Go home to your bed, you hoary old sinner ! And for my part, I'm not sorry that my son should see, for once in his life, to what shame and degradation and dishonour, drunkenness and whisky may bring a man. Never mind the change, sir !—Curse the change !' says the colonel, facing the amazed waiter. 'Keep it till you see me in this place again, which will be never—by George, never !' And shouldering his stick, and scowling round at the company of scared bacchanalians, the indignant gentleman stalked away, his boy after him.

Clive scowled rather shamefaced, but I fear the rest of the company looked still more foolish.

'Aussi quo diable venait il faire dans cette galere ?' says King of Corpus to Jones of Trinity, and Jones gave a shrug of his shoulders, which were smarting, perhaps, for that uplifted cane of the colonel's had somehow fallen on the back of every man in the room.<sup>39</sup>

The aspects of Colonel Newcome's character suggested in this scene are elaborately developed in the chapters that follow. We are given a hundred examples of his simplicity, his gentleness, his generosity. We see how firm are his principles and how rigidly he observes them. And at the same time we are made aware of the extreme narrowness of his horizon—his total lack of worldly wisdom, his quaint notions about literature and the arts, and his old-world views as to the innate superiority of the gentleman. The attitude of amused respect that Thackeray displays towards Colonel Newcome in these early chapters harks back to his attitude towards Major Carmichael-Smyth before he reached the age of criticism. It is best summed up in his account of Clive's relations with his father:

Mr Clive had a very fine natural sense of humour which played perpetually round his father's simple philosophy, with kind and smiling comments. Between this pair of friends the superiority of wit lay, almost from the very first, on the younger man's side, but, on the other hand, Clive felt a tender admiration for his father's goodness, a loving delight in contemplating his older's character, which he has never lost.<sup>40</sup>

By the time the novel was a third completed, however, Thackeray had grown a little tired of Colonel Newcome. "The Colonel is going to India the day after tomorrow," he told Mrs Proctor while writing the eighth monthly part of his novel. "You'll be glad to hear that I know. He is a dear old boy but confess you think he is rather a twaddler."<sup>41</sup> As he wrote the following number, Thackeray noted "The story seems to breathe freely after the departure of the dear old boy."<sup>42</sup>

## VI

Not until his novel was nearly two-thirds over did Thackeray bring the Colonel back to England and after his reappearance in monthly number sixteen he is presented in a new light. In these later chapters Thackeray views him very much as in maturity he regarded his stepfather. Affection and admiration remain but the forbearance that had previously led him to pass over shortcomings in silence has disappeared. The attitude of exasperated resignation that Colonel Newcome now aroused in Thackeray is illustrated in a story told of him while he was a guest of George Eliot's friends the Brays at Coventry.

When they asked him whether he had a good night, he answered: How could I with Colonel Newcome making a fool of himself as he has done? MRS BRAY: But why did you let him? THACKERAY: Oh, it was in him to do it. He must.<sup>43</sup>

The Colonel's sole motive is to make his son happy. But he does not understand Clive's nature and his benefactions fail entirely of their intended effect. He believes that a young man should live the life of a gentleman. Clive must accordingly give up painting the only occupation that interests him. He believes that a young man should settle in life. When the Colonel cannot win for Clive his cousin Ethel the girl that he loves he must accordingly marry Rosey Mackenzie with whom he has nothing in common. He believes that a young man should take his due place in the world. Clive must accordingly live in a fine house entertain dull people on an extravagant scale and feign an interest in the affairs of the Indian banking company which is the source of his father's fortune. All the Colonel's fond wishes are gratified by his son with the result that the two are miserable together.

We don't understand each other (says Clive in words that Thackeray might have used to describe his relations with Major Carmichael-Smith) but we feel each other as it were by instinct. Each thinks in his own way but knows what the other is thinking. We fight mute battles, don't you see and our thoughts though we don't express them are perceptible to one another and come out from our eyes, or pass out from us somehow and meet and fight and strike and wound.<sup>44</sup>

The narrowing effects of the Colonel's simplicity of his inability to comprehend any side of a question except his own are evident again in his failure of magnanimity towards Ethel and Barnes Newcome. Ethel becomes the embodiment of worldliness to him because she has given up Clive for a wealthier

suntor, though her motives for this action are in part very creditable. Because Barnes had deceived him, while there still seemed some hope that his sister might marry Clive, the Colonel pursues his nephew with an implacable animosity which arouses in the reader something like sympathy even for this irritating young man.

Time was when the colonel would have viewed his kinsman more charitably [Thackeray writes], but fate and circumstance had angered that originally friendly and gentle disposition, hate and suspicion had mastered him, and if it cannot be said that his new life had changed him, at least it had brought out faults for which there had hitherto been no occasion, and qualities latent before.<sup>45</sup>

But life holds in store for the Colonel experiences that are to purify him of his hate and anger. His prosperity does not last. His Indian banking firm fails. He is reduced abruptly to penury, a misfortune that he could have met alone with cheerful fortitude, for his tastes are frugal, and he liked the grand existence into which success had forced him as little as did Clive. But he has been so bad a man of business as to have made no provision for those dependent on him, and Clive's family as well is left with almost nothing to live on. From this circumstance derives the Colonel's purgatory. He is forced to drag out a wretched existence in a squalid Boulogne lodging house, tormented by the wrong-headed reproaches of Clive's mother-in-law, the terrible "Campaigner." In such a passage as the following Thackeray wings the final bitterness from time's revenges.

He had no money, Thomas Newcome. He gave up every farthing. After having impoverished all around him, he had no right, he said, to touch a sixpence of the wretched pittance remaining to them—he had even given up his cigar, the poor old man, the companion and comforter of forty years. He was 'not fit to be trusted with money,' Mrs Mackenzie said, and the good man owned, as he ate his scanty crust, and bowed his noble old head in silence under that cowardly persecution.

And this, at the end of three score and seven or eight years, was to be the close of a life which had been spent in freedom and splendour, and kindness and honour, this is the reward of a noble heart—the tomb and prison of a gallant warrior who had ridden in twenty battles—whose course through life had been a bounty wherever it had passed—whose name had been followed by blessings and whose career was to end here—here—in a mean room, in a mean alley of a foreign town—a low furious woman standing over him and stabbing the kind defenceless breast with killing insult and daily outrage!

Clive wondered the old man lived. Some of the woman's taunts and jibes, as he could see, struck his father so that he gasped and started back as if some one had lashed him with a whip. 'He would make away with himself,' said poor Clive, 'but he deems this is his punishment, and that he must bear it as long as it pleases God.'<sup>46</sup>

The Colonel's ordeal lasts for a year long enough to shatter his health and break his spirit. He escapes from the Campaigner at last to the care—as his friends think—of a sister in law at Brighton to whom he had been kind in earlier years. Only when Pendennis attends a Founder's Day dinner at Grey Friars is it discovered what course the old gentleman has actually adopted. This scene is the real culmination of the book. At the beginning of the novel, when the Colonel first returns from India the reader glimpses him for a moment at his old school before he begins to test the promise of life at home about which he has been dreaming during a third of a century's exile.

Under the great archway of the hospital he could look at the old Gothic building, and a black-gowned pensioner or two crawling over the quiet square or passing from one dark arch to another. The boarding-houses of the school were situated in the square hard by the more ancient buildings of the hospital. A great noise of shouting, crying, clapping forms and cupboards, treble voices, bass voices, poured out of the schoolboys' windows: their life bustle and gaiety contrasted strangely with the quiet of those old men creeping along in their black gowns under the ancient arches yonder whose struggle of life was over whose hope and noise and bustle had sunk into that grey calm. There was Thomas Newcome arrived at the middle of life standing between the shouting boys and the tottering seniors.<sup>1</sup>

Twenty years later as the novel draws to its close Thackeray's contrasting use of the same setting intensifies the quiet irony of his climactic scene.

Yonder sit forty cherry-cheeked boys thinking about home and holidays tomorrow. Yonder sit some three-score old gentlemen pensioners of the hospital, listening to the prayers and the psalms. A plenty of candles light up the chapel, and this scene of age and youth, and early memories, and pompous death. How solemn the well-remembered prayers are here uttered again in the place where in childhood we used to hear them! How beautiful and decorous the rite; how noble the ancient words of the supplications which the priest utters, and to which generations of fresh children and troops of bygone seniors have cried Amen under those Arches! The service for Founder's Day is a special one—one of the psalms selected being the thirty-seventh, and we hear—

23 The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way.

4 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.

25 I have been young, and now am old yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread.

As we came to this verse, I chanced to look up from my book towards the swarm of black-coated pensioners: and amongst them—amongst them—sat Thomas Newcome.

His dear old head was bent down over his Prayerbook; there was no mistaking him. He wore the black gown of the pensioners of the Hospital of Grey Friars. His Order of the Bath was on his breast. He stood there amongst the poor brethren, uttering the responses to the psalm. The steps of this good man had been ordered hither by heaven's decree: to this Alma-house! Here it was ordained that a life all love, and kindness and honour should end! I heard no more of prayers and psalms, and sermon, after that.<sup>2</sup>

Once again it may be remarked that such passages as this, in which Thackeray glances at our common human lot while passing judgment on the events of his fictional history, have endured much better than his more florid effects, such as the famous scene of the Colonel's death, which was once regarded as inferior only to that of Lear's.<sup>49</sup> Yet the narrative of the Colonel's gradual euthanasia is not really superfluous or antichlomatic. We still have to be shown how the old man's ordeal entirely purges him of pride, obstinacy, and vindictiveness, how he lives out his brief span of life quite contentedly at Grey Friars, absorbed in his pensioner's routine and his grandchild, how even the abuse of the "Campaigner," to which he is occasionally subjected, no longer disturbs him, since he has slipped into second childishness and can escape at will into the past. Thus the episode of his death, although susceptible to severe criticism when considered out of context, is moving enough when read in the setting of the two chapters which led up to it, for in them Thackeray has shown at length exactly how it is that Thomas Newcome's heart becomes "as that of a little child."<sup>50</sup>

## VII

The response of successive generations of Thackeray's readers to Colonel Newcome has followed the same pattern that we have already noted with regard to Amelia and to Helen Penderennis. Of all Thackeray's characters he was the supreme favorite with the Victorian public. He was regarded as finally vindicating Thackeray from the charges of cynicism and misanthropy that had been brought against him on the basis of his earlier work. "There has never been a nobler sketch than that of the Colonel," we read in *Blackwood's Magazine*, "The innocent heart and simple honour of this old man, and his horror of all falsehood and impurity, are enough to cover a multitude of Mr Thackeray's sins."<sup>51</sup> The *Times* reviewer was still more categorical in his praise. "The real hero of his story, Colonel Newcome, is conceived and executed in a spirit that has never been excelled. He is a noble creation, worthy of any age, or of any reputation, present or past. Upon the creation of this character Mr Thackeray may rest his fame."<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, so profound was the admiration of Thackeray's contemporaries for the Colonel that he was more than once reproved for not entertaining sufficient respect for his creation.

His illustrator Dicky Doyle was distressed because Thackeray seemed to him to look down upon the Colonel for not being a man about town.<sup>52</sup> It disturbed Hawthorne that Thackeray should be able to bring himself to read the scene of the Colonel's death in a 'Cider Cellar' not unlike the Cave of Harmony over a glass of gin and water.<sup>53</sup> Admirers in Philadelphia could not believe that the novelist was serious when he told them that Dickens's Dan'l Peggotty was a finer gentleman than Colonel Newcome.<sup>54</sup> This attitude persisted to the end of the century. Stevenson for example was even more unmeasured in his praise of Colonel Newcome than Thackeray's contemporaries had been.

A gentleman came from his [Thackeray's] pen by the gift of nature. He could draw him—the next thing to the work of God—human and fine and noble and frail, in Colonel Newcome. If the art of being a gentleman were forgotten like the art of staining glass, it might be learned anew from that one character. It is learned there I dare say daily. What experience is more formative what step of life is more efficient than to know and weep for Colonel Newcome?<sup>55</sup>

Modern critics on the other hand have been very severe with the Colonel. Charles Whibley holds that he carries unselfishness to the point of inhumanity, his generosity, his kindness, his folly are all too great for flesh and blood. [he is] the travesty of a man.<sup>56</sup> Sir Osbert Sitwell speaks of that revolting prig and paragon Colonel Newcome the epitome of the Old School Tie.<sup>57</sup> George Bernard Shaw finds in him a signal example of the enslavement of Thackeray's mind to conventional Victorian standards. Yet Shaw admits that Thackeray tells the truth in spite of himself.

He exhausts all his feeble pathos in trying to make you sorry for the death of Col. Newcome, imploring you to regard him as a noble-hearted gentleman, instead of an insufferable old fool. . . . but he gives you the facts about him faithfully.<sup>58</sup>

Such criticisms as those of Whibley and Sitwell may be discounted because they are plainly based on an incomplete understanding of Thackeray's novel. As we have seen the Colonel during a large part of *The Newcomes* is anything but a paragon. Thackeray is at great pains to show in detail his stupidity, his obstinacy and his vindictiveness. But the terms of Shaw's judgment perhaps point the way to a just estimate of Colonel Newcome. Shaw grants the fidelity with which Thackeray's portrait adheres to the realities of human nature. Thackeray tells the truth, he gives the facts. Interpreting Shaw's reference to Thackeray's enslaved mind in the light



of another Shavian proposition, that "the real slavery of today is slavery to ideals of goodness,"<sup>60</sup> we find that Shaw is really taking issue with Thackeray over the latter's display of affection for the Colonel, his determination to apotheosize him despite the revelation that he has himself provided of the Colonel's failings. The relation of Colonel Newcome to Thackeray's personal history, Thackeray's identification of him with Major Carmichael Smyth to whom he remained loyal even while recognizing his many shortcomings, explains Thackeray's seemingly perverse adherence to an ideal of goodness of which he had so clearly demonstrated the deficiencies. We may regret Thackeray's failure to provide a detached estimate of the principal figure of his novel, but our regret should not prevent us from realizing that the Colonel is one of his supreme achievements in character creation, an achievement, moreover, possible to him only because of the insight that he gained through emotional attachment. Perhaps the last word on this subject may be left to Anthony Trollope, who writes in his *Autobiography*:

I know no character in fiction unless it be Don Quixote, with whom the reader becomes so intimately acquainted as with Colonel Newcome. How great a thing it is to be a gentleman at all parts! How we admire the man of whom much may be said with truth! Is there any one of whom we feel more sure in this respect than of Colonel Newcome? It is not because Colonel Newcome is a perfect gentleman that we think Thackeray's work to have been successful, but because he has had the power to describe him as such and to force us to love him, a weak and silly old man, on account of this grace of character.<sup>61</sup>

CHAPTER EIGHT  
THE BURIED LIFE

I

During the last decade of his life Thackeray was an established celebrity. Though he made two long lecture tours in America and travelled a good deal on the continent London remained his home. He spent his leisure hours among his family and intimate friends in London society and in the bohemian haunts of his literary and artistic familiars. When he undertook the editorship of the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1850 his hair had been white for several years his two daughters were young ladies and he was generally regarded as an old man. His death in 1863 surprised and shocked his intimates but did not astonish his great host of readers who found it difficult to believe that he was only fifty two.

Thackeray had said good by to his youth at the conclusion of the Brookfield affair. Describing himself ruefully to his friends as an extinct volcano he settled down to making fatherhood the principal concern of his life. He wrote to his mother in 1855

Why perhaps it is better than the wife whose want has made me so uncomfortable these many years past. I have 2 little wives not jealous of each other and am at last most comfortable in my *karem*.

The months of unrest that followed his break with Mrs Brookfield produced a state of mental exhaustion that combined with the physical distress of his disease-racked body to render a smoother less hectic existence essential to him. He organized his life about one objective to replace the patrimony he had lost as a young man in order to leave his daughters sufficiently provided for. He ceased to live dangerously and became in Edward FitzGerald's phrase a sad Epicurean—just desirous to keep on the windy side of bother & pain.<sup>2</sup>

Success and popularity brought new friends and new responsibilities. His lecture tours impressed Thackeray with the fact

that thousands of readers all over the world regarded him with affection and respect. Always extraordinarily sensitive to what others thought of him, he tried as he never had before to be agreeable and inoffensive in his writings. The lectures themselves bear witness to a relaxation in his standards of candor and trenchancy. He wrote to his daughter Anne in 1853, "perhaps this lecturing is not truth but a certain dexterous & showy manner of accommodating truth to circumstances."<sup>7</sup> And a few months later he was referring to his performances in disgust as "this ambulatory quack business."<sup>8</sup> But he could make money more rapidly by lecturing than in any other way, and he went on with it as long as his health permitted.

Thackeray's anxiety to make a fortune for his daughters to conserve a little physical and mental energy that remained to him, and to conciliate his friends and admirers made him much less critical of life than he had been in the past. His letters are filled with recantations of what he had come to regard as his earlier cynicism. He wrote to James Hannay for example, in 1854

Love is a higher intellectual exercise than Hatred, and when you get one or two more of those young ones you write so pleasantly about, you'll come over to the side of the kind wags, I think, rather than the cruel ones.<sup>9</sup>

The mental unrest of his earlier life disappeared, and he became a relatively calm and peaceful hedonist. But there always remained a certain *fond* of unresolved melancholy in his nature. He is describing himself, when he writes of Harry Esmond in *The Virginians*

He was not unhappy—to those about him most kind—most affectionate, obsequious even to the women of his family, whom he scarce ever contradicted, but there had been some bankruptcy of his heart, which his spirit never recovered. He submitted to life rather than enjoyed it.<sup>10</sup>

Thackeray's exhaustion, the relaxation of his intellectual and artistic standards, and his reconciliation to life are all reflected in the writings of his last ten years. He had been forced to work "crop after crop from his brain, manuring hastily, sub-soiling indifferently, cutting and saving and cutting again." With his break with Mrs. Brookfield he ceased to live an intense emotional life, and he had consequently to draw on capital rather than on interest in his fiction. While he reproduced the surface of life as accurately as ever, he did not cut below it as he had in *Vanity Fair* and *Esmond*. There are no Amelias or Lady Castlewoods in his later books. He came more and more to talk about things

that have no direct connection with his story knowing that his readers regarded him as a privileged friend of the family whose charm wit and sagacity made his opinion on any topic worth having Anthony Trollope underlines his most serious failing

he allowed his mind to become idle In the plots which he conceived and in the language which he used, I do not know that there is any perceptible change but in *The Virginians* and in *Philip* the reader is introduced to no character with which he makes a close and undying acquaintance And this, I have no doubt, is so because Thackeray himself had no such intimacy His mind had come to be weary of that fictitious life which is always demanding the labour of new creation, and he troubled himself with his two Virginians and his Philip only when he was seated at his desk.

In other words he lost the habit of entire absorption in his characters and their involvements which had marked his state of mind in earlier days and as a result his fiction tended to become mere make believe

Thackeray's reconciliation to life gives his later books a dominant tone quite different from that of *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis* Endeavoring to be playful rather than satiric he inquired I wonder if sneering is of the Devil and laughter not wicked? He took pains to be pleasant to avoid giving offence by too blunt a statement of heterodox opinions He softened and generalized his revelations of the hidden self interest that underlies seemingly altruistic actions He writes in his later books as a father addressing his children rather than as a man of the world speaking in good society Pen remarks in *Philip* that during his youth he had been considered a dangerous man but that now in maturity he is a model of propriety

I am ready to say that Nero was a monarch with many elegant accomplishments, and considerable natural amiability of disposition. I praise and admire success wherever I meet it. I make allowances for faults and shortcomings, especially in my superiors; and feel that, did we know all, we should judge them very differently. People don't believe me, perhaps, quite so much as formerly. But I don't offend; I trust I don't offend.

There are two ways of regarding the alteration that took place in Thackeray's attitude towards life as he grew older His later point of view may be considered either as a surrender or as a victory Thackeray himself regarded it as a victory though his assurance was troubled by uneasy twinges of doubt When John Cordy Jeaffreson published a novel in 1863 called *Let It Down* Thackeray said to him It would be the very title for my story of my own life In a letter to his mother

just after he finished *Philip*, a sequel to a narrative that he had published in 1840, he wrote

Think of the beginning of the story of the little Sister in the Shabby Genteel Story twenty years ago and the wife crazy and the Publisher refusing me 15£ who owes me £13 10 and the Times to which I apply for a little more than 5 guineas for a week's work, refusing to give me more and all that money difficulty ended, God be praised, and an old gentleman sitting in a fine house like the hero at the end of a story <sup>10</sup>

*Dennis Duval*, indeed, the novel on which Thackeray was engaged when he died, is written by the hero at the end of his own story. Old Admiral Duval, an *alter ego* of Thackeray, reflects

'Tis the privilege of old age to be garrulous, and its happiness to remember early days. As I sink back in my arm-chair, safe and sheltered *post tot discrimina*, and happier than it has been the lot of most fellow sinners to be, the past comes back to me—the stormy past, the strange unhappy yet happy past—and I look at it scared and astonished sometimes, as huntsmen look at the gaps and ditches over which they have leapt, and wonder how they are alive <sup>11</sup>

Some readers find serenity in this and similar passages, others merely complacency.

Whatever our estimate of Thackeray's later outlook, there can be no doubt that it led to a different kind of fiction than that which he wrote before *The Newcomes*. His later novels, particularly *The Virginians* and *Dennis Duval*, are romantic in mood if they remain realistic in treatment. In the late forties and early fifties Thackeray had delighted to burlesque romantic fiction, and when he wrote *Esmond*, he created as serious and profound a study of human nature as any of his novels of modern life. In his later books, however, he sought primarily to amuse his readers, to lead them into "happy, harmless fable-land", <sup>12</sup> and though his keen sense of reality did not desert him, his aim in writing fiction became essentially frivolous, as it had never been before.

It is not essential, then, that the relation between Thackeray's personal history and his later work be considered in detail. We may pass directly to a summary of the findings of this study and an application of these findings to the problem with which we began, the degree to which Thackeray's authority as a novelist is impaired by his intermittent sentimentalism.

## II

Our best starting point is Thackeray's native endowment as a writer. He was eminently, as he himself said, a man of "the *genus inutabile*" <sup>13</sup>. He had an acute sensitivity that

kept him uneasily conscious of everything happening around him a rawness of nerve that did not allow him to cushion himself against the encounters of everyday intercourse with the dullness of perception that protects the ordinary human being.

He had distinct and rather painful sensations. Walter Bagehot comments, where most men have but confused and blurred ones. He could not help seeing everything and what he saw made so near and keen an impression upon him that he could not again exclude it from his understanding.<sup>14</sup>

Particularly as a young man his reactions were often of an intensity far beyond those of a normally constituted individual. As one example among many consider his response to public executions. This grim feature of early nineteenth century life held a terrible fascination for him. He returned home one night in 1838 from Hugo a romantic tragedy *Marion Desorme* disgusted and sick.

The last act ends with an execution [he told his wife] & you are kept waiting a long hour listening to the agonies of parting lovers, & grim speculations about head-chopping, dead bodies, coffins & what not—Bah! I am as sick as if I had taken an emetic.<sup>15</sup>

Two years later he forced himself to witness the hanging of the murderer Courvoisier. For a fortnight he could think of nothing else.

It is most curious the effect his death has had on me [he noted] upon the mind, like cold plum pudding on the stomach.<sup>16</sup>

it weighs

The poor wretch's face will keep itself before my eyes, and the scene mixes itself up with all my occupations.<sup>17</sup>

Yet Thackeray did not fail to see that his sensitivity was an artistic asset as well as a personal inconvenience. He makes Sterne tell him during their colloquy in *The Roundabout Papers*

Your sensibility is your livelihood, my worthy friend. You feel a pang of pleasure or pain? It is noted in your memory and some day or other makes its appearance in your manuscript.<sup>18</sup>

We have seen how the circumstances of Thackeray's personal history established in his mind a sharp dichotomy between the outside world and his home circle. When mingling with those whom he did not know well he kept the eager response of his sensitive temperament under severe restraint. Rehuffed and deceived in youth he took care not to expose himself to further disappointments in maturity. Though he remained a gregarious man and though his manner was not aloof or unfriendly casual

acquaintances were apt to find him cold and reserved. He mingled in society as an observer rather than as an active participant, seeking primarily to satisfy an omnivorous curiosity. He describes himself when he writes of Arthur Pendennis:

As another man has an ardour for art or music, or natural science, Mr. Pen said that anthropology was his favourite pursuit, and had his eyes always eagerly open to its infinite varieties and beauties, contemplating with an unflinching delight all specimens of it in all places to which he resorted, whether it was the coquetting of a wrinkled dowager in a ball room, or a high-bred young beauty blushing in her prime there, whether it was a hulking guardsman cooing a servant girl in the park—or innocent little Tommy that was feeding the ducks whilst the nurse listened.<sup>10</sup>

By training himself to understand and judge the men and women whom he met, he built up the knowledge of human nature in society which informs his great fictional panoramas. It was from this level of his experience as well that he drew the materials for many of his memorable characters, for Jos Sedley, old Miss Crawley, and old Osborne, for Major Pendennis and Blanche Amory, for Barnes Newcome, perhaps for Becky Sharp herself. We have seen that in these creations his control rarely falters, they are perfect of their kind. But we have observed as well that they are presented as a rule in terms of external impressions, that Thackeray hardly tries in these portraits to penetrate to the deeper levels of personality.

The Thackeray seen by the intimates of his home circle was a very different person from the Thackeray who figured in London society. Perhaps Carlyle expresses most pungently the contrast between Thackeray's mask and the face beneath it. He wrote to Emerson in 1853:

Thackeray is a big fellow, soul and body, of many gifts and qualities (particularly in the Hogarth line, with a dash of Sterne superadded), of enormous *appetite* withal, and very uncertain and chaotic in all points except his *outer breeding*, which is fixed enough and *perfect*, according to the modern English style. I rather dread explosions in his history. A *big*, fierce, weeping, hungry man, not a strong one.<sup>20</sup>

The testimony of Anthony Trollope, who also knew Thackeray both in society and at home, is to the same effect:

I regard him as one of the most tender-hearted human beings I ever knew, who, with an exaggerated contempt for the foibles of the world at large, would entertain an almost equally exaggerated sympathy with the joys and troubles of individuals around him.<sup>21</sup>

The picture emerges of a restless, insecure man, who despite his outer poise and polish was permanently uneasy, permanently in need of reassurance.

He found this reassurance as we have seen in the companionship of a succession of women his mother his wife Mrs Brookfield and, during his last years his daughters Except for Mrs Carmichael-Smyth, who was of a rather more vigorous nature they all had much the same character soft simple innocent and womanly Indeed Thackeray himself occasionally noted his almost exclusive predilection for this feminine type In 1840 he wrote to his mother of a new acquaintance,

There is nothing about her but simplicity : & I like this milk-& water in women —perhaps too much, under valuing your ladyship's heads, and caring only for the heart.<sup>21</sup>

Moments of intimate communion with these women whom he loved made life worth living for Thackeray by enabling him to express freely the feelings and responses that he rigidly suppressed in his dealings with the outside world Through them he made contact with what Arnold has described as *The Buried Life*

Only—but this is rare—  
When a beloved hand is laid in ours,  
When, jaded with the rush and glare  
Of the interminable hours,  
Our eyes can in another's eyes read clear  
When our world-deafened ear  
Is by the tones of a lov'd voice caressed,—  
A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast  
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again  
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,  
And what we mean, we say and what we would, we know  
A man becomes aware of his life's flow  
And hears its winding murmur and he sees  
The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze.<sup>22</sup>

Thackeray's buried life had a significance for him beyond success and beyond art It gave him his ultimate values

### III

Nearly all of the weaknesses that this study has revealed in Thackeray's fiction derived from the part of himself that he kept inviolate from the world at large and shared only with a few intimates but so too did many of the strong points of his novels By comparing the gains and losses that resulted from his decision in *Vanity Fair* to abandon the relatively objective realism of his earlier work, to accept as part of the novelist's responsibility the task of understanding sympathetically and of judging his principal characters perhaps we can strike a balance with regard to this aspect of his fiction



We have seen how his loyalty to the "originals" of Amelia, of Mrs Pendennis, and of Colonel Newcome made it impossible for him to judge these characters with detachment and impartiality. He did not fail to tell the truth about such characters, but he constantly sought to apologize for them and to explain away their shortcomings. Hence the ambiguity in his presentation of them, the sharp discrepancy between what they say and do and Thackeray's estimate of them, which bothers modern readers.

We have seen also that an otherwise unsatisfactory world was redeemed for Thackeray by the simplicity, tenderness, and warmth of affection that he found in the intimates of his home circle. Since these qualities assuaged his insecurity and gave him the reassurance that his sensitive temperament demanded, he placed on them a valuation that seems excessive in an age whose serious literature has made a fetish of tough-mindedness. D. H. Lawrence wrote, commenting upon Ernest Hemingway's first book of short stories

It is really honest. And it explains a great deal of sentimentality. When a thing has gone to hell inside you, your sentimentalism tries to pretend it hasn't. But Mr Hemingway is through with the sentimentalism.<sup>24</sup>

We too like to think that we are through with sentimentalism, and in reading Thackeray, who is not afraid of giving himself away, who does not shield the vulnerable spots in his personality by maintaining a careful objectivity, we are sometimes made acutely uncomfortable.

Perhaps the head and front of Thackeray's offending is precisely that he knows very well he is giving himself away. Like Sterne, he is quite aware of the sentimental element in his work. "I rank myself among the spoonies," he once confessed to Mrs Brookfield. "Softheartedness seems to me better than anything."<sup>25</sup> Many passages in his books are in effect continuations of private confessions to the women that he loved best. They give us the Thackeray *intime* who was otherwise revealed only to his closest friends. When beginning *Pendennis* he wrote to Mrs Brookfield about his mother

I look at her character, and go down on my knees as it were with wonder and pity. It is Mater Dolorosa, with a heart bleeding with love. Is not that a pretty phrase? I wrote it yesterday in a book, whilst I was thinking about her—and have no shame somehow now in writing thus sentimentally to all the public, though there are very few people in the world to whom I would have the face to talk in this way *tete a-tete*. To you I can because you are made of the same soft stuff.<sup>26</sup>

In *Vanity Fair* there are relatively few of these passages of intimate confidence. As the Manager of the Performance Thackeray preserves for the most part the façade that he presented to the outside world. Once he reached an understanding with his audience however sentimental passages began to multiply in his stories. By the time he wrote *The Virginians* and *Philip* they had come to be regarded almost as his trade mark. Unhappily in his later work these passages no longer stemmed directly from experience—he gave up Mrs Brookfield in 1851 and no one ever quite filled the place that she had occupied in his life—and they consequently came to seem factitious the expression of emotions that Thackeray still wanted to feel but no longer did feel. Ruskin noted that the pathetic fallacy causes uneasiness in descriptions of nature the moment the mind of the speaker becomes cold.<sup>27</sup> So it is with the sentimental view that Thackeray takes of his favored characters.

One finds a hint of this tendency as early as chapter fifty of *Vanity Fair*, in which he describes the events leading to Amelia's decision to give up little Georgey Osborne to his grandfather. Thackeray wrote to Leigh Hunt—and it must be granted that Dickens's Harold Skimpole was well qualified to pass on the point—I should like you to tell me if there isn't a little delicate fiddle-playing in the last chapter of the present No XIV.<sup>28</sup> Yet despite the detached attitude towards his pathetic effects that Thackeray's request implies the emotion informing this chapter impresses the reader as authentic enough. Only after Thackeray's characters ceased to be real to him did his pathetic effects come to seem contrived. He had written to his mother in 1842 when pressure of work forced him to leave his children in Paris and return to London.

It was pleasant thinking of Anne; [but] when I write to her it's a days work—blubbering just as I used to do when I left you to go to school—not from any excess of affection filial or paternal as I very well know; but from sentiment as they call it—the situation was pathetic.<sup>29</sup>

It is because they exploit such abstract pathos arising out of situations conventionally regarded as in the abstract affecting rather than out of the involvements of his created characters that certain passages in Thackeray's later fiction seem insincere.

So much for the hazards to which Thackeray was exposed by his decision in *Vanity Fair* and his later books to include in his fiction the people situations and emotions that meant most to him in his personal history. We may turn now to the

ways in which his work was strengthened by this resolve. Its great usefulness to him was to make his warmth of feeling, his sense of human solidarity, an available resource on which he could draw, and hence to enable him to explore personal relations with a penetration that he was unable to achieve by other means. Oscar Wilde's dictum that "an ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style"<sup>30</sup> is accepted by many respected modern novelists. But for Thackeray the way to understanding was through sympathy.<sup>31</sup> "Since a novelist is a single person with one sensibility," Virginia Woolf points out, "the aspects of life in which he can believe with conviction are strictly limited."<sup>32</sup> Thackeray partially surmounted this limitation through his intuitive sense of what went on inside people to whom he was bound by close emotional ties. By drawing upon his "buried life," by basing such characters as Amelia and Lady Castlewood upon those persons who humanly meant everything to him, he was able greatly to extend his range as a novelist. In such portraits he pierced to the deeper levels of personality, he showed himself a novelist of character as well as of manners. And it is here, after all, that fiction makes its supreme appeal.

#### IV

Even if it is granted that this sort of intimate portrayal is an essential of classic fiction, the further question remains whether certain of Thackeray's portraits are not spoiled by an excess of the very sympathy that enabled him to conceive them at all. Mr. F. R. Leavis holds that the emotional stresses which drive Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*

involve confusions and immature valuations, they belong to a stage of development at which the capacity to make some essential distinctions has not yet been arrived at—at which the poised impersonality that is one of the conditions of being able to make them can't be achieved. There is nothing against George Eliot's presenting this immaturity with tender sympathy, but we ask, and ought to ask, of a great novelist something more. "Sympathy and understanding" is the common formula of praise, but understanding, in any strict sense, is just what she doesn't show. To understand immaturity would be to 'place' it, with however subtle an implication, by relating it to mature experience.<sup>33</sup>

The value of Thackeray's portraits of Amelia or Colonel Newcome might be questioned on similar grounds, since Thackeray's excessive praise of these characters prevents him from properly presenting them and hence reveals a comparable failure to achieve "poised impersonality."

The data presented in this book should help to resolve such

doubts. We have seen that Thackeray's temperament was so sensitive as to make it impossible for him to live even with those he loved best without frequent disagreements. He was always acutely aware of what the authors of *The Real Charlotte* describe as that measuring and crossing of weapons that takes place unwittingly and yet surely in the consciousness of everyone who lives in the intimate connection with another. His pervasive dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the originals of Amelia of Mrs Pendennis and of Colonel Newcome determines the fashion in which they are portrayed and insensibly communicates itself to his readers despite his overt exaltation of these characters. Hence his portraits of such figures are shaped by a tacit judgment which is balanced and mature though his explicit estimates the moral opithots that he applies to these characters controlled as they are by his emotional allegiances sometimes contradict this tacit judgment. Amelia, Mrs Pendennis and Colonel Newcome are shown in the round dramatically they are completely presented even if Thackeray's formal evaluation does them only partial justice.

George Eliot says of *The Mill on the Floss*

Pray notice how one of my critics attributes to me a disdain for Tom [Tulliver]; as if it were not my respect for Tom which infused itself into my reader—as if he could have respected Tom if I had not painted him with respect.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly it is Thackeray alone who can be regarded as responsible for his readers' awareness of discrepancies between text and commentary in his portraits of Amelia and Colonel Newcome. Surely we should recognize that beside the creative power shown in these portraits such discrepancies pale into insignificance.

Fiction is not afraid of complexity writes John Hersey, as journalism is. A journalist is not allowed to be confused he must know. But it is not necessarily a disadvantage to a novelist to be confused as a human being—provided he has discipline as a writer.<sup>12</sup> We may freely grant Thackeray an occasional confusion as a human being if we remember that his discipline as a writer rarely falters. We have seen how Shaw the most hostile and grudging of his critics had perforce to admit this truth. He exhausts all his feeble pathos in trying to make you sorry for the death of Colonel Newcome. Shaw wrote but he gives you the facts about him faithfully. These words underline the opposition of modern and Victorian estimates of human values and the incompatibility of satirist of sentiment and sentimental satirist. They are also the tribute of one great master of reality to another.

## NOTES

### CHAPTER ONE

<sup>1</sup> "The Reaction against Tennyson," *English Critical Essays Twentieth Century*, ed Phyllis M Jones (London, 1933), p 60

<sup>2</sup> *Victorian Prose Masters* (New York, 1901), p 46

<sup>3</sup> Laura Benét, *Thackeray of the Great Heart and Humorous Pen* (New York, 1947), Joan Rosalind Gould, *Young Thackeray William Makepeace Thackeray* (Boston, 1940), J Y T Greig, *Thackeray, A Reconsideration* (London, 1950), Lionel Stevenson, *The Showman of Vanity Fair* (New York 1947)

<sup>4</sup> By Mr Lisle Bell, Professor Lambert Egnis, and myself

<sup>5</sup> See particularly David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists* (London, 1934), John W Dodds, *Thackeray A Critical Portrait* (New York, 1941), V S Pritchett, *In my Good Books* (London, 1943), Raymond Las Vergnas, *W M Thackeray, l'homme, le penseur, le romancier* (Paris, 1932) George Saintsbury's *A Consideration of Thackeray* (London, 1931) collects the introductions provided by this distinguished Thackerayan for the Oxford edition of Thackeray's *Works*, 17 volumes (London, 1908) This edition will be cited hereafter as *Works*

<sup>6</sup> Examples from two generations, Bloomsbury and anti Bloomsbury, will suffice to illustrate this point Writing on "The Artist and Psycho-Analysis" in *The Hogarth Essays* (New York, 1928, p 292), Roger Fry argues that most readers go to novels for day dreams in print But, he continues, "No one who hoped to get an ideal wish fulfilment would go to *Mme Bovary* or *Anna Karenina* or even *Vanity Fair*" Similarly, F R Leavis remarks in *The Great Tradition* (London, 1949, p 21) that "Thackeray is a greater Trollope It will be fair enough to Thackeray if *Vanity Fair* is kept current as, in a minor way, a classic"

<sup>7</sup> I borrow these terms from the late E K Brown's admirable essay "David Copperfield," *Yale Review*, XXXVII (Summer, 1948), 651-666 See also Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (London, 1921), and the fourth chapter of Edith Wharton's *The Writing of Fiction* (London, 1925) Though Mr Lubbock strives to hold the balance even between "crowded" and "bare" novel, his sympathies are clearly with the narrow Jamesian form Mrs Wharton leans the other way

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the discussion of *Vanity Fair* in Mr Lubbock's study

<sup>9</sup> *Works*, 24 volumes (London, 1907-1909), VII, 1

<sup>10</sup> *Works*, XI, 99-100,

<sup>11</sup> The same, p 216

<sup>12</sup> The same, p 229

<sup>13</sup> *Works*, XII, 198

<sup>14</sup> The same, p 164

<sup>15</sup> The same, p 410

<sup>16</sup> *Works*, XIV, 9

<sup>17</sup> The same, p 118

<sup>18</sup> *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London, 1933), p 96

<sup>19</sup> *Notes on Life and Letters, Works*, 20 volumes (London, 1921-1927), XVIII, 35 Conrad acknowledges a kinship to Thackeray in his scornful reference to "The End of the Tether," the tale in which he goes farthest in his concessions to "the unofficial sentimentalism" of his time, as "the touching, tender, noble captain Newcome-Colonel Whalley thing" (*Letters from Conrad*, ed Edward Ginnett, London, 1928, p 188)

- \* Elizabeth Bowen "Notes on Writing a Novel," *Orion II* (London, 1945) p. 18.
- <sup>11</sup> J. W. Cross, *George Eliot's Life as Related in her Letters and Journals* 3 volumes (Edinburgh, 1886) I, 433.
- <sup>12</sup> *Modern Painters Works* ed. E. T. Cook and A. D. O. Wedderburn, 39 volumes (London, 1903-1917) V 204, 210.
- <sup>13</sup> *Works* ed. Forrest Morgan, 5 volumes (Hartford 1891) II, 195.
- <sup>14</sup> P. 3.
- <sup>15</sup> "Thackeray's Tutelary Spirit," *The Listener* 15 September 1940 p. 452.
- <sup>16</sup> *The Subjection of Women, Three Essays* ed. M. G. Fawcett (London, 1912) p. 535.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Enjoyment of Literature* (New York, 1935) pp. 118-119.
- <sup>18</sup> *Twilight on Parnassus* (London, 1939) p. 35.
- <sup>19</sup> *Essays in Criticism Second Series Works* 15 volumes (London, 1903-1904) IV 35.
- <sup>20</sup> "Thackeray's Works," *Edinburgh Review* XCIX (1854) 230.
- <sup>21</sup> Preface to *John Bull's Other Island, Works* 30 volumes (New York, 1930-1932) XI, 21.
- <sup>22</sup> Victor Hugo's *Romanesque, Works* 26 volumes (London, 1922-1923) IV 48.
- <sup>23</sup> Of all Victorian novelists the Brontës have suffered most from these aberrations. See, for example, Rosemond Langbridge, *Charlotte Brontë, A Psychological Study* (London, 1920) and Virginia Moore, *The Life and Eager Death of Emily Brontë* (London, 1936).
- <sup>24</sup> Miss Crawley Jos. Sedley and Major Pendennis, whose prototypes can be identified with equal positiveness upon other evidence.
- <sup>25</sup> *Henry James Letters to A. C. Benson and Auguste Monod* ed. E. F. Benson (London, 1930) p. 40.
- <sup>26</sup> *Letters of Henry James* ed. Percy Lubbock, 2 volumes (London, 1920) I 116.
- <sup>27</sup> Preface to *The Spoils of Poynton, Works* X, v.
- <sup>28</sup> Preface to *The Princess Casanovino, Works* V xxiii.
- <sup>29</sup> (London 1938) pp. 216-217.
- <sup>30</sup> *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray* ed. Gordon N. Ray 4 volumes (Cambridge Massachusetts, 1945-1948) II 772-773. This edition will be cited hereafter as *Letters*.
- <sup>31</sup> *Works* XIII, 666.
- <sup>32</sup> *Works* XII, 570.
- <sup>33</sup> *Works* XIII, 454; *Letters* II 770-780.
- <sup>34</sup> *Works* XV 361 443.
- <sup>35</sup> *Letters* IV 378.
- <sup>36</sup> The same, III, 438.
- <sup>37</sup> Manuscript recollections of Lady Ritchie 1864-1865.
- <sup>38</sup> *Letters* II, 407.
- <sup>39</sup> *Letters* III, 459.
- <sup>40</sup> The same, p. 439.
- <sup>41</sup> *Works* XII, 767.
- <sup>42</sup> Preface to *The Princess Casanovino, Works* V xi.

## CHAPTER TWO

- <sup>1</sup> James Hannay *A Brief Memoir of the Late Mr. Thackeray* (Edinburgh, 1864) p. 5.
- <sup>2</sup> *Soliloquies in England* (New York, 1922) p. 59.
- <sup>3</sup> See *The Calcutta Gazette*, 9 January 1864; and H. W. B. Moreno "The Birthplace of William Makepeace Thackeray" *Century Review* I (1915) 8. I shall not as a rule cite sources for the factual particulars of my narrative in this chapter since I plan to cover the same material in greater detail in my biography of Thackeray.
- <sup>4</sup> *Works* XIV 60.

- <sup>5</sup> *Works*, XVII, 495
- <sup>6</sup> The same, p. 554
- <sup>7</sup> In *Ice Willie Winkie*
- <sup>8</sup> See John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, ed. J. W. T. Ley (London, 1928), pp. 23-36
- <sup>9</sup> "Gentlemen Rankers"
- <sup>10</sup> *Works*, XIII, 30
- <sup>11</sup> Manuscript letter to Mrs. Butler, 10<sup>th</sup> July, 1820
- <sup>12</sup> Quoted by Maria Knox, Mrs. Carmichael Smyth's sister, in a manuscript letter to Mrs. Butler, 16 February 1821
- <sup>13</sup> *Letters*, II, 361
- <sup>14</sup> "Public Schools," *Works* (London, 1851), p. 185
- <sup>15</sup> Disraeli, *Vivian Grey*, *Novels and Tales*, ed. Philip Guedalla, 12 volumes (London, 1926-1927), I, 4
- <sup>16</sup> *Letters*, I, 262
- <sup>17</sup> The same, p. 152
- <sup>18</sup> The same, p. 279
- <sup>19</sup> The same, p. 295-296
- <sup>20</sup> Richard Bedingfield, "Recollections of Thackeray," *Cassell's Magazine*, II (1870), 232
- <sup>21</sup> *Letters*, I, 311
- <sup>22</sup> See Appendix A Shawe Genealogy
- <sup>23</sup> Richard Cannon, *Historical Record of the Lightly seventh Regiment, or the Royal Irish Fusiliers* (London, 1853) pp. 95-96, *Ecclesiastical Records (Wills)*, Bengal, IV, 226-227, Commonwealth Relations Office
- <sup>24</sup> *Letters*, I, 321
- <sup>25</sup> The same, p. 424
- <sup>26</sup> The same, pp. 303-304
- <sup>27</sup> The same, p. 319
- <sup>28</sup> The same, pp. 318-319
- <sup>29</sup> See chapters 25 to 28
- <sup>30</sup> *Letters*, I, clxv
- <sup>31</sup> The same, p. 316
- <sup>32</sup> The same, p. 321
- <sup>33</sup> The same, p. 354
- <sup>34</sup> *Letters of Thomas Carlyle to his Youngest Sister*, ed. Charles Townsend Copeland (Boston, 1899), p. 86
- <sup>35</sup> *Letters*, I, 397
- <sup>36</sup> *Works*, I, 299-300
- <sup>37</sup> Manuscript letter from Isabella Thackeray to Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth, 23 May 1839
- <sup>38</sup> *Letters*, I, 394
- <sup>39</sup> The same, p. 420
- <sup>40</sup> The same, p. 467
- <sup>41</sup> The same, p. 462
- <sup>42</sup> The same, p. 463
- <sup>43</sup> The same, p. 467
- <sup>44</sup> The same, p. 483
- <sup>45</sup> *Works*, XIV, 929
- <sup>46</sup> *Letters*, II, 8
- <sup>47</sup> *Letters*, I, 473
- <sup>48</sup> The same, p. 480
- <sup>49</sup> *Letters*, II, 15
- <sup>50</sup> The same, pp. 30-31
- <sup>51</sup> *Letters*, IV, 146
- <sup>52</sup> *Works*, XV, 502
- <sup>53</sup> *Letters*, II, 440
- <sup>54</sup> *Letters to her Family*, ed. L. Huxley (London, 1924), p. 171
- <sup>55</sup> *Letters*, II, 193

<sup>10</sup> Last Words on Translating Homer Works V 377

<sup>11</sup> Letters II 14

<sup>12</sup> The same p. "

<sup>13</sup> An inference from the following remark reported by Lady Rutland: "My father once said to me when I was a girl: 'You needn't read Harry Lyndon; you won't like it.' (Biographical Introductions to Thackeray, Work 13 volumes London, 1893-1895) V xxxii.) These remarks will be cited hereafter as *Biographical Introductions*.

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that the novel exists in two form: *The Luck of Harry Lyndon* which appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* between January and December 1844; and *The Memoirs of Harry Lyndon* a careful revision of 1850. Thackeray's pruning of his text in the *Memoirs* was everywhere in the interest of artistic consistency; but the preoccupations that led him to write the book are much clearer in the *Luck* on which my discussion is accordingly based. Thackeray did not approve the change in title. When he first saw proof of the third volume of his *Miscellanies* in which the *Memoirs* appeared he inquired of his publishers, Bradbury and Francis: "Why was the title to *Harry Lyndon* omitted as I wrote it? Does it not appear in the single parts? (Fragmentary manuscript letter)

<sup>15</sup> Works VI 289. See also pp. 204 and 303.

<sup>16</sup> Barry does have a code of sorts. Thackeray makes him reverence a kind of parody of aristocratic standards, a code of gentlemanliness distorted to fit his own character; much as Browning's Caliban is made to create a God in his own image. He was constant to his firm of worship. Harry says of his gambling partner turned priest to old age; and I as a man of honour and principle was resolute to mine (Works VI 207). Thus Harry prides himself on being always ready to give satisfaction in a duel, on an ostentatious free-handedness with eccentrics and strangers combined with a neglect of the claims of friend and relatives, on the prompt payment of his gambling debts (though of no others) and on an absolute reverence for birth and rank. What these traditional traits of the "gentleman" are worth, Thackeray says in effect is shown by the character of those who boast of them.

<sup>17</sup> See Works VI 231 278-290 309-311.

<sup>18</sup> Thackeray suppressed these passages in his revision of 1850.

<sup>19</sup> Works VI 310.

<sup>20</sup> The same pp. 310-311.

<sup>21</sup> The same p. 196.

<sup>22</sup> See Letters II 30-31.

<sup>23</sup> Yet even at this period the grim tone of the novel tested Thackeray's powers of endurance. When the book was little more than half completed he complained that it was lying like a nightmare on his mind. (Letters II 149); and its final instalments were written slowly & with great difficulty" (The same p. 186).

### CHAPTER THREE

<sup>1</sup> In "Fan-fair: One Version of the Novelist's Responsibility" *Essays by Divers Hands* XXX (London: The Royal Society of Literature, 1950) 87-101.

<sup>2</sup> Letters II 78.

<sup>3</sup> "You know you are only a piece of Amelia—My mother is another half; my poor little wife *yet pour beaucoup*" (The same p. 304).

<sup>4</sup> The same p. 440.

<sup>5</sup> See Letters I 31.

<sup>6</sup> Works XI 131-13.

<sup>7</sup> The same, p. 881. In the 1861 edition the phrase is altered to "a dear little creature" (The same p. 7).

<sup>8</sup> The same p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> The same p. 124.

<sup>10</sup> The same p. 411.

<sup>11</sup> Ed. Wilfrid Ward (London 1913) pp. 191-192.



<sup>12</sup> *Works*, XI, 320-321

<sup>13</sup> The same, p 360

<sup>14</sup> The same, pp 371-372

<sup>15</sup> The same, p 383

<sup>16</sup> *Letters*, II, 309

<sup>17</sup> One is reminded of the very different pictures that Dickens drew of the young Maria Beadnell as Dora in *David Copperfield* and of the middle-aged Maria Beadnell as Flora Finching in *Little Dorrit*. There is considerable evidence, it should be noted, that Thackeray modelled the Amelia of *Vanity Fair*'s later chapters upon Mrs Brookfield quite as much as upon Isabella. In the early months of 1848 Thackeray was not yet profoundly attached to Mrs Brookfield, since his intimacy with her was just beginning. See *Letters*, II, 394-395, 684

<sup>18</sup> *Works*, XI, 852-853

<sup>19</sup> He perhaps yielded to pressure from his readers in this matter. "Mrs Liddell one day said, 'Oh, Mr Thackeray, you must let Dobbin marry Amelia.' 'Well,' he replied, 'he shall, and when he has got her, he will not find her worth having.'" (*Letters*, II, 642) George Eliot's comment concerning Trollope's *Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite* applies equally to the conclusion of Thackeray's history of Dobbin and Amelia. "Men are very fond of glorifying that sort of dog-like attachment," she wrote (Cross, *George Eliot's Life*, III, 128). "It is one thing to love because you falsely imagine goodness,—that belongs to the finest natures,—and another to go on loving when you have found out your mistake."

<sup>20</sup> *Letters*, II, 423

<sup>21</sup> *Works*, XI, 878

<sup>22</sup> "*Vanity Fair*—and *Jane Eyre*," LXXXIV (December, 1848), 159-160

<sup>23</sup> "*Vanity Fair*," 12 August 1848, p 795

<sup>24</sup> "*Vanity Fair*," 22 July 1848, p 709

<sup>25</sup> A statement in the introduction to the interesting edition of *Vanity Fair* published by Chivers at Bath in 1919. Whibley had been equally positive in *William Makepeace Thackeray* (London, 1903), p 96. "There is little doubt," he wrote, "that Thackeray despised Amelia."

<sup>26</sup> "Mrs Rawdon Crawley," XCV (June, 1911), 1022

<sup>27</sup> *The Enjoyment of Literature*, pp 118-119

<sup>28</sup> *Works*, XI, 2

<sup>29</sup> *The Portrait of a Lady*

<sup>30</sup> *In My Good Books* (London, 1943), pp 118, 121

<sup>31</sup> *Works*, III, 425

<sup>32</sup> *Ecclesiastical Records, Bengal*, IV, 58, 124, 156, Commonwealth Relations Office

<sup>33</sup> *Register of Bengal Civilians*, p 130, Commonwealth Relations Office

<sup>34</sup> The same

<sup>35</sup> *Ecclesiastical Records (Wills), Bengal*, 1801, number 28, Commonwealth Relations Office

<sup>36</sup> *Ecclesiastical Records, Bengal*, V, 356, Commonwealth Relations Office

<sup>37</sup> *Ecclesiastical Records (Wills), Bengal*, 1805, number 57, Commonwealth Relations Office

<sup>38</sup> *Ecclesiastical Records, Bengal*, VII, 199, Commonwealth Relations Office

<sup>39</sup> Major V C P Hodson, *The Officers of the Bengal Army*, 4 volumes (London, 1927-1947)

<sup>40</sup> *Ecclesiastical Records, Bengal*, V, 95, VIII, 40, *Ecclesiastical Records (Wills), Bengal*, 1819, pp 865-872, Commonwealth Relations Office

<sup>41</sup> *Calcutta Gazette*, 12 February 1807, supplement, p 2

<sup>42</sup> Hodson, *Bengal Army*

<sup>43</sup> *Ecclesiastical Records (Wills), Bengal*, 1819, pp 865-872, Commonwealth Relations Office, manuscript letter from Mrs Carmichael Smyth to Mrs Butler, 3 February 1820

<sup>44</sup> Manuscript letters from Maria Knox to Mrs Butler, 9 October 1821 and 1 February 1822

<sup>46</sup> Manuscript letter 25 August 1840

<sup>47</sup> Manuscript family letters of the eighteen twenties.

<sup>48</sup> *Letters* I, 273

<sup>49</sup> The same p. 289

<sup>50</sup> The same, p. 290

<sup>51</sup> The same p. 468.

<sup>52</sup> The same, p. 468

<sup>53</sup> *Works* III, 425

<sup>54</sup> *Biographical Introductions* I xxvii

<sup>55</sup> The same p. xxviii.

<sup>56</sup> Undated manuscript letter

<sup>57</sup> *Letters* II 309

<sup>58</sup> The same, pp. 323-324

<sup>59</sup> *Works* XI, 103

<sup>60</sup> The same, p. 1-8

<sup>61</sup> There is one lapse from this detachment (The same p. 164)

<sup>62</sup> This passage must have been written at precisely the time when Mrs. Butler was returning to Paris to die. Thackeray did not have the heart to continue his portrait of Miss Crawley after his grandmother's death.

<sup>63</sup> *Works* XI 437

<sup>64</sup> R. B. Ramsbotham, *The Editor's Note Book, Bengal Past and Present*, XXXIV (1907) 144-145. There is no real discrepancy between Beveridge's testimony as recorded here and as recorded by G. W. Gurner, *The Editor's Note Book, Bengal Past and Present*, XLII (1931) 187 where Beveridge denies that Merriek Shaw himself was the original of Jon Sedley. Lord Beveridge informs me in a letter of 17 November 1948 that there is no further evidence bearing upon the point in his family papers.

<sup>65</sup> See above, p. 13

<sup>66</sup> Lady Ritchie, *The Boyhood of Thackeray Saint Nicholas* XVII (1889) 103

<sup>67</sup> H. T. Prinsep, *General Register of the Honble East India Company's Civil Servants of the Bengal Establishment from 1790 to 1842* (Calcutta, 1844) p. 389

<sup>68</sup> The same.

<sup>69</sup> *Register of Bengal Civilians* p. 1701 Commonwealth Relations Office.

<sup>70</sup> *Urula Low Fifty Years with John Company* (London, 1939) pp. 199-200. Miss Low makes George write "gambles rude".

<sup>71</sup> The same p. 199

<sup>72</sup> Gerald Ritchie, *The Ritchies in India* (London, 1900) p. 90

<sup>73</sup> *Low Fifty Years with John Company* p. 290

<sup>74</sup> The same, pp. 290-291

<sup>75</sup> The same p. 291

<sup>76</sup> The same, p. 293

<sup>77</sup> The same p. 294.

<sup>78</sup> The same, p. 296.

<sup>79</sup> The same, p. 297

<sup>80</sup> The same, p. 301

<sup>81</sup> The same p. 306

<sup>82</sup> Stephen Wheeler, *Annals of the Oriental Club 1824-1858* (London, 1925) p. 147

<sup>83</sup> *Letters* II, 178

<sup>84</sup> The same, p. 145.

<sup>85</sup> In the *Register of Bengal Civilians* p. 1701 Commonwealth Relations Office his death is recorded as having occurred on 4 October 1844. Administration of his goods and chattels was granted to Emily Anne Dick, wife of William Fleming Dick, next of kin, on 18 October 1844 (*Administrations* 1844, number 76 Somerset House)

<sup>86</sup> Gerald Ritchie (*Ritchies in India* p. 96) writes that George "committed suicide in Paris in 1844. My father had to break the news to the Irvines." Since I have not succeeded in finding any printed account of George's death, I

have preferred to follow Indian records in locating the place of its occurrence at Geneva

<sup>86</sup> His property was sworn under £800 in 1844 and resworn the following year under £600 (*Administrations*, 1844, number 76, Somerset House)

<sup>87</sup> *Works*, XI, 27

<sup>88</sup> The same, p 28

<sup>89</sup> The same, p 875

<sup>90</sup> The same, p 877 The crimes of Burke and Thurtell need no gloss, but it may not be superfluous to point out that Thackeray himself celebrated the exploits of Catherine Hayes both in a story and in a ballad (*Works*, III, 3-187, VII, 102-105)

<sup>91</sup> This parallel between fiction and life gives rise to an interesting speculation. We have seen that most of George's money (like Jos's) had disappeared at the time of his death. Was there a Becky in his life siphoning it off, and did Thackeray know about her?

## CHAPTER FOUR

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, XII, xxxv

<sup>2</sup> The same

<sup>3</sup> Nathaniel Wright Stephenson, *The Spiritual Drama in the Life of Thackeray* (London, 1913)

<sup>4</sup> *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed F G Kenyon, two volumes (London, 1898), I, 401

<sup>5</sup> See *Essays by Divers Hands*, XXV, 94-96

<sup>6</sup> *Letters*, II, 534

<sup>7</sup> The same, pp 538-539

<sup>8</sup> *Views and Reviews*, ed Le Roy Phillips (Boston, 1908), p 233 Phillips' text reads "the painter itself"

<sup>9</sup> *Letters*, II, 457

<sup>10</sup> See above, p 14

<sup>11</sup> I owe this significant detail to Professor Ennis

<sup>12</sup> Lady Ritchie, *Chapters from Some Unwritten Memoirs* (London, 1894), p 15

<sup>13</sup> *Letters*, IV, 378

<sup>14</sup> Richard Boddingfield, *Cassell's Magazine*, II, 12

<sup>15</sup> *Letters*, II, 506

<sup>16</sup> *Chapters*, p 16

<sup>17</sup> *Letters*, II, 506

<sup>18</sup> John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, ed J W T Loy (London, 1928), p 556 See chapter twenty of *David Copperfield*

<sup>19</sup> Manuscript letter

<sup>20</sup> *Letters*, II, 525

<sup>21</sup> The same, p 207

<sup>22</sup> *Biographical Introductions*, VIII, xxxvii

<sup>23</sup> *Cassell's Magazine*, II, 136

<sup>24</sup> *Letters*, III, 12-13

<sup>25</sup> Manuscript letter of 19 July 1855, partially printed in *Letters*, IV, 440

<sup>26</sup> Lady Ritchie's manuscript *Reminiscences* of 1878

<sup>27</sup> Tennyson described *Pendennis* to Edward FitzGerald (*Letters and Literary Remains*, ed W A Wright, 7 volumes, London, 1902-1903, I, 280-281) as "quite delicious, it seemed to him so mature"

<sup>28</sup> On this point see Stephen Gwynn's preface to *Pendennis*, three volumes (London, 1900), I, xi

<sup>29</sup> *Works*, XII, 13

<sup>30</sup> The same, p 18

<sup>31</sup> The same, p 183

<sup>32</sup> The same, p 5

<sup>33</sup> The same, p 987

<sup>1</sup> The same p 18 See also pp \*5 828 641-642 735-737

<sup>22</sup> The same p 518

<sup>23</sup> See below pp 92-95

<sup>27</sup> *Letters* II, 681

Manuscript letter 6 July 1858 This passage has been printed in my article *New Light on Thackeray* *London Sunday Times* 29 May 1949

<sup>28</sup> See *Letters* II 340-341

<sup>29</sup> Perhaps Miss Drury At any rate Brookfield wrote to his wife in Yellow plumb English on 27 August 1847 Is muther is now jellus of drury & she is to gow to the write abowt under sun ridikus pretext or uthar (Manuscript letter).

<sup>31</sup> *Works* XII, 730-731

<sup>32</sup> The same pp. 735-736 Lady Ritchie writes: I can remember the morning Helen died. My father was in his study in Young Street, sitting at the table at which he wrote It stood in the middle of the room, and he used to sit facing the door I was going into the room but he motioned me away An hour afterwards he came into our schoolroom, half laughing and half-ashamed, and said to us: I do not know what James can have thought of me when he came in with the tax-gatherer just after you left, and found me blubbering over Helen Pendennis's death. (*Biographical Introductions* II, xxxix)

<sup>33</sup> *Letters* III, 13

"Thackeray and his Female Characters," *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, N.S. VIII (1864) 162

<sup>34</sup> So George Orwell drives home an assertion that Agnes Wickfield is the most disagreeable of Dickens's heroines by remarking "Agnes is the real legions angel of Victorian romance, almost as bad as Thackeray's Laura" (*Critical Essays* London, 1946 p 54)

<sup>35</sup> *The Enjoyment of Literature*, p. 119

## CHAPTER FIVE

<sup>1</sup> *William Makepeace Thackeray* (London, 1903) p 145

The same, p 133

<sup>2</sup> *Works* XII, 92.

<sup>3</sup> So I interpret the phrase though it could conceivably refer simply to the Major's Wellingtonian nose The same, p. 486.

<sup>4</sup> The same, p 92.

<sup>5</sup> The same p. 104.

<sup>6</sup> The same, p 125

The same, p 109

The same, pp 461-462.

<sup>8</sup> The same, pp. 2, 27

<sup>11</sup> The Marquess of Steyne Wenham, and Wagg in Thackerayan terms. The same, pp 661-666 and elsewhere.

<sup>12</sup> The same, p 979

<sup>13</sup> The same, pp \*99-210

<sup>1</sup> In the Genealogical Office Dublin Castle there is a pedigree of the Shaws of High Bulhalgh, which carries the line back to Edward II. The relation of this family to the Galway Shaws is not clear Under the date 22 February 1810 Lt. Col. Merriek Shawe has noted upon this document The above is a True Copy of an antient pedigree on Parchment now in the possession of Mrs. Anna Shawe now wife of (Roger) Jones of Dollanstown in Coy of Meath Esq. and of Mrs. Sydney Shaw now wife of the Honble Matthew Plunket which two ladies are the daughters and coheirs of Colonel Henry Shawe late of the Eleventh Regt. of Foot." See Appendix, A Shawe Genealogy

<sup>1</sup> Add. Mss 13 767 folio 172 British Museum.

The same, folios 85-88.

<sup>17</sup> W O 27/748, folio 52A, Public Record Office. In this statement of services Shawe writes that he "Raised men for an Emergency Sept 1782 in the first Connaught Regt of Fencibles & served one year in Ireland." Since he was not yet of age in May of 1789, he cannot have been more than fourteen at the time of this exploit.

<sup>18</sup> *Add Mss* 13,767, folios 1-2, British Museum

<sup>19</sup> The same, folio 5

<sup>20</sup> The same, folio 8

<sup>21</sup> F A Hayden, *Historical Record of the 76th "Hindostan" Regiment* (Lichfield, 1908), pp 6-15, 262, W O 27/748, folio 52A, Public Record Office

<sup>22</sup> *Add Mss* 13, 767, folio 44, British Museum

<sup>23</sup> Hayden, *Historical Record*, p 262

<sup>24</sup> *Add Mss* 13, 767, folios 10-12, British Museum

<sup>25</sup> The same, folio 13

<sup>26</sup> The same, folio 18

<sup>27</sup> The same, folio 33

<sup>28</sup> The same, folios 40-41

<sup>29</sup> The same, folio 44

<sup>30</sup> The same, folios 85-88

<sup>31</sup> The same, folios 115-117

<sup>32</sup> *Add Mss* 13,781, folio 49, British Museum

<sup>33</sup> *Diaries and Correspondence of the Right Hon George Rose*, ed L V Harcourt, 2 volumes (London, 1860), II, 165

<sup>34</sup> *Add Mss* 13,781, folios 78-80, British Museum

<sup>35</sup> *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Report on the Manuscripts of J B Fortescue, Esq, preserved at Dropmore*, 9 volumes (London, 1892-1915), IV, 474

<sup>36</sup> *Add Mss* 13,781, folio 43, British Museum

<sup>37</sup> The same, folio 69

<sup>38</sup> *Add Mss* 37,281, folio 297, British Museum

<sup>39</sup> *Add Mss* 13,767, folio 113, British Museum

<sup>40</sup> *Add Mss* 13,781, folio 7, British Museum

<sup>41</sup> The same, folios 9-10

<sup>42</sup> The same, folio 104

<sup>43</sup> The same, folio 47

<sup>44</sup> The same

<sup>45</sup> *Supplementary Despatches*, ed by his son, 15 volumes (London, 1858-1872) V, 318

<sup>46</sup> *The Croker Papers*, ed Louis J Jennings, 3 volumes, (London, 1887), I, 337

<sup>47</sup> The same

<sup>48</sup> *Despatches*, ed Colonel Gurwood, 12 volumes (London, 1834-1838), III, 700-701. A large volume of Shawe's letters to Wellington survives among the Wellesley Papers (*Add Mss* 13,778, British Museum), and some of the Duke's replies are printed in his *Despatches*.

<sup>49</sup> *Add Mss* 13,767, folio 52, British Museum

<sup>50</sup> The same, folio 114

<sup>51</sup> The same, folio 88

<sup>52</sup> W O 27/748, folio 52A, Public Record Office

<sup>53</sup> *Diaries of George Rose*, II, 165

<sup>54</sup> *The Creevey Papers*, ed Sir Herbert Maxwell 2 volumes (London, 1904), I, 89-90, 118

<sup>55</sup> *Add Mss* 13,767, *passim*, British Museum

<sup>56</sup> On 15 August 1809 Shawe sent a long letter to Sydenham from "Before Flushing" describing the fighting (*Add Mss* 37,287, folio 1ff, British Museum)

<sup>57</sup> Hayden, *Historical Record*, pp 76-79

<sup>58</sup> W O 27/748, folio 52A, Public Record Office

<sup>59</sup> Wellington, *Supplementary Despatches*, VII, 266

<sup>60</sup> The same, VII, 279

<sup>61</sup> *Dublin Evening Packet*, 11 November 1843

<sup>62</sup> Wellington, *Supplementary Despatches*, X, 19

<sup>62</sup> *Add. Mss.* 37,310 folios 167-168 37,312 folio 31; British Museum.

<sup>63</sup> *Add. Mss.* 38,292 folio 329, British Museum.

<sup>64</sup> *Royal Kalendar* 1820 and 1823.

<sup>65</sup> *Wellington Supplementary Despatches* VII 2.

<sup>66</sup> *The Croker Papers* I 10<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> Robert Roulere Pearce, *Memoirs and Correspondence of the most Noble Richard Marquess Wellesley* 3 volumes (London 1846) III 370-381.

<sup>68</sup> Information kindly provided from the archives of these clubs by their present secretaries.

<sup>69</sup> *Works* XII<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>70</sup> *Add. Mss.* 37,310 folio 167 British Museum.

<sup>71</sup> *Add. Mss.* 37,313, folios 3-1-3<sup>aa</sup> British Museum.

<sup>72</sup> *Add. Mss.* 37,310 folio 146 British Museum.

<sup>73</sup> *The Creevey Papers* I 1<sup>a</sup> 1<sup>a</sup> 9. It must be granted that Creevey at this period was bitterly hostile to Wellesley and therefore an unreliable witness. Two years later Lady Holland called him a "mischievous toad" because of his jokes about the Marquess. But Creevey's reports are borne out in *The Farington Diary* (ed. James Greig 8 volumes, London 1922 1928) under 8 April 1811 where Sir Thomas Lawrence speaks of Wellesley as "having ruined his fortune by his excessive expenses on women."

<sup>74</sup> *Add. Mss.* 37,310 folios 163-164 British Museum.

<sup>75</sup> *Add. Mss.* 37,309 folio 241 British Museum.

<sup>76</sup> See Pearce *Wellesley* III 370-380.

<sup>77</sup> *Add. Mss.* 38,293 folio 3<sup>a</sup> 8, British Museum.

<sup>78</sup> The same.

<sup>79</sup> See *The Wellesley Papers* 2 volumes (London 1914), II 187 161 195-196; *Letters of George IV* ed. A. Aspinall, 3 volumes (Cambridge 1938) III 287-29; *Add. Mss.* 37,302, folios 141 306 310 British Museum. On Canning's death Shaw wrote to Sir William Knighton: "Humble as individual as I am I feel the loss of I might almost presume to say a friend—who always treated me with a degree of kindness & condescension which I can never forget" (*Letters of George IV* III 288).

<sup>80</sup> Pearce, *Wellesley* III 388-389.

<sup>81</sup> *Add. Mss.* 37,313 folios 18-19, British Museum.

<sup>82</sup> *Letters of George IV* III, 151-16.

<sup>83</sup> *The Creevey Papers* II 63.

<sup>84</sup> *Add. Mss.* 37,311 folio 96 British Museum.

<sup>85</sup> *Creevey's Life and Times* ed. John Gore (London 1931) pp. 374-375.

<sup>86</sup> *The Creevey Papers* II 3<sup>a</sup> 8.

<sup>87</sup> The same, II, 267.

<sup>88</sup> The same.

<sup>89</sup> *Wellesley Papers* II 54.

<sup>90</sup> *Add. Mss.* 37,312 folio 60 British Museum.

<sup>91</sup> *Boyle's Court Guide for January* 1840 p. 582.

<sup>92</sup> *Letters* I 306.

<sup>93</sup> The same, p. 308.

<sup>94</sup> The same pp. 307 431 439.

<sup>95</sup> The same, p. 397.

<sup>96</sup> The same p. 431.

<sup>97</sup> *Add. Mss.* 37,313 folios 18-19 British Museum.

<sup>98</sup> *Letters* II 21.

<sup>99</sup> *Add. Mss.* 12 767 folio 111 British Museum.

<sup>100</sup> *Letters* II 78-79.

<sup>101</sup> *Add. Mss.* 37,316 folio 149, British Museum.

<sup>102</sup> The same paper printed a brief obituary notice four days later: "Colonel Meyrick Shaw [sic], whose lamented death we recently recorded was a man of great talents, businesslike habits, and suavity of manner. He was long honoured with the friendships of the Duke of York and the Marquess Wellesley on the staff of both of whom he served at different periods, at the Horse Guards, as

under secretary and private secretaryship of India, and Vice Royalty of distinction are placed in mourning Trench families of Galway, and to a ment to the peerage he so zealous wished to see placed in the enjoin Mr Fitzpatrick was presumably the first Earl of Upper Ossory. At his death in 1818, but Mr Fitzpatrick Ossory in 1869

<sup>104</sup> *Works*, XII, 995

<sup>105</sup> The same, p. 91

<sup>106</sup> Not that Thackeray was slavish of Major Pendennis. Much observed Shawe went into the making of it as with Becky Sharp, is to be accepted embodied certain aspects of his own through life as a gentleman," he told Major Pendennis you have hit it. Lady Ashburton, "because it was only about Lords and great people:

<sup>107</sup> *Works*, XII, 517

<sup>108</sup> The same, p. 1001

<sup>109</sup> The same, p. 655

<sup>110</sup> *Partial Portraits* (London, 188

<sup>111</sup> For a further development of

<sup>112</sup> The same, p. 906

<sup>113</sup> The same, p. 91

<sup>114</sup> The same, p. 109

<sup>115</sup> The same, p. 102

<sup>116</sup> The same, p. 203

<sup>117</sup> The same, p. 559

<sup>118</sup> The same, pp. 455, 456, 893

<sup>119</sup> Very occasionally, as if sudden cover design of his monthly part embodiment of the selfish worldly passages, it must be granted, The with that which he adopts towards example, *Works*, XII, 585-586

## CH

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, II, 685-686

<sup>2</sup> 21 December 1850, pp. 929-930

<sup>3</sup> *Yesterdays with Authors* (Boston

<sup>4</sup> 6 November 1852, pp. 1199-12

<sup>5</sup> "Mr Thackeray's New Novel,

<sup>6</sup> *Letters*, II, 736

<sup>7</sup> See above, pp. 53-54

<sup>8</sup> See particularly I, xciv-c

<sup>9</sup> *The Fable of the Bees*, ed. F. B.

<sup>10</sup> *Letters*, II, 277

<sup>11</sup> *Biographical Introductions*, II,

<sup>12</sup> Manuscript letter to William J.

<sup>13</sup> Manuscript letter to Jane Oct.

<sup>14</sup> The Rev. W. Tuckwell, *A. W.*

<sup>15</sup> Quoted by Lord Lyttleton in *W. H. Brookfield*, ed. by Mrs. Broc

- <sup>16</sup> *The Greville Memoirs 1814-1860* ed Lytton Strachey and Roger Fulford 8 volumes (London, 1938)
- <sup>17</sup> Manuscript letter to William Henry Brookfield 31 July 1850
- <sup>18</sup> *Letters* II, 380.
- <sup>19</sup> The same, III 183
- <sup>20</sup> The same, II 231.
- <sup>21</sup> Manuscript letter to William Henry Brookfield, 13 October 1848.
- <sup>22</sup> Information communicated to me by Mrs. Richard Fuller Lady Ritchie's daughter
- <sup>23</sup> Manuscript letter 26 December 1848.
- <sup>24</sup> Manuscript letter September 1851
- <sup>25</sup> Manuscript letter 13 October 1848
- <sup>26</sup> *Letters* II 475-476
- <sup>27</sup> The same, IV 431
- <sup>28</sup> Manuscript letter 28 April 1849
- <sup>29</sup> Manuscript letter 3 May 1849
- <sup>30</sup> Thackeray seems to have thought that Brookfield was feigning illness. Is Wm. really unwell at Southton?" he inquired of Mrs Brookfield (*Letters* II 68)
- <sup>31</sup> Frances Brookfield, *The Cambridge Apostles* (London, 1900) p 275
- <sup>32</sup> *Letters* IV 431
- <sup>33</sup> The same, p. 430
- <sup>34</sup> Manuscript letter September 1851 partially printed in *Letters* IV 431-432
- <sup>35</sup> Manuscript letter 26 September 1851
- <sup>36</sup> "I wrote a bit yesterday that was quite Satanic he notes in the same letter "and raged about with a dreadful gaiety" Thackeray is apparently referring here to the final paragraph of the Prologue: I look into my heart and think that I am as good as my Lord Mayor and know I am as bad as Tyburn Jack. Give me a chain and red gown and a pudding before me, and I could play the part of alderman very well, and sentence Jack after dinner Starve me, keep me from books and honest people, educate me to love dice, gin and pleasure, and put me on Hounslow Heath, with a purse before me and I will take it. And I shall be deservedly hanged, say you, wishing to put an end to this prosing I don't say no I can't but accept the world as I find it in cluding a rope's end, as long as it is in fashion." (*Works* XII 16)
- <sup>37</sup> *Letters* II, 361
- <sup>38</sup> The same, IV 432, corrected from the manuscript.
- <sup>39</sup> *Cakes and Ale* (New York, 1935) pp. 306-308
- <sup>40</sup> *Letters* II, 815
- <sup>41</sup> The theme is one to which Thackeray returns in various passages of Book One. See *Works* XIII, 74-76, 93-98 115-120 136-137
- <sup>42</sup> The same, p. 116.
- <sup>43</sup> The same, p. 98.
- <sup>44</sup> The same, pp 96-97
- <sup>45</sup> The same, p. 117
- <sup>46</sup> The same, p. 119
- <sup>47</sup> The same, p. 120
- <sup>48</sup> The same, pp. 83-87
- <sup>49</sup> See the same pp. 75-76
- <sup>50</sup> *Letters* III, 248.
- <sup>51</sup> *Works* XIII, 128.
- <sup>52</sup> The same, p. 131.
- <sup>53</sup> The same, p. 168.
- <sup>54</sup> The same pp 167-168
- <sup>55</sup> Manuscript letter September 1851
- <sup>56</sup> *Works* XIII 172. There are passages in this part of the novel which form a direct rather than a dramatic commentary on Thackeray's state of mind after his break with Mrs. Brookfield. The reflections on p. 101 for example, are clearly inspired by his longing for a renewal of the companionship that she gave him



- <sup>47</sup> The same, p 173.  
<sup>48</sup> Manuscript letter, 14 February 1856  
<sup>49</sup> *Works*, XIII, 213-214  
<sup>50</sup> *Letters*, II, 470  
<sup>51</sup> *Works*, XIII, 463  
<sup>52</sup> *Letters*, III, 391  
<sup>53</sup> Rossetti, *The House of Life*, sonnet XCVII  
<sup>54</sup> *Essays* (London, 1882), p 258  
<sup>55</sup> John Taylor Brown, *Dr John Brown* (Edinburgh, 1903), pp 96-97  
<sup>56</sup> *Letters*, II, 646  
<sup>57</sup> The same, p 650  
<sup>58</sup> The same, p 813  
<sup>59</sup> *Works*, XII, 601, 632  
<sup>60</sup> *Letters*, II, 652  
<sup>61</sup> *Works*, XII, xxxvii  
<sup>62</sup> The same, p xxxvi  
<sup>63</sup> *Notes on Novelists* (London, 1914), pp 256-257  
<sup>64</sup> Manuscript letter, June 1850  
<sup>65</sup> "Notes on Writing a Novel," *Orion*, II (1945), 21  
<sup>66</sup> Manuscript letter to Miss Perry, 7 December 1852  
<sup>67</sup> *Appreciations* (London, 1889), p 108  
<sup>68</sup> *Collected Essays and Papers*, 4 volumes (London, 1923) III, 56

## CHAPTER SEVEN

- <sup>1</sup> Manuscript letter to Miss Elliot and Miss Perry of 13-15 July 1853, partially published in *Letters*, IV, 435  
<sup>2</sup> Manuscript letter to Mrs Elliot and Miss Perry of 28 July 1853  
<sup>3</sup> *Letters*, III, 287  
<sup>4</sup> The same, p 294  
<sup>5</sup> "English Novelists," *The Romance of English Literature*, ed W J Turner (New York, 1944), p 250  
<sup>6</sup> Manuscript letter, 8 July 1855  
<sup>7</sup> The information concerning the Carmichael-Smyths which follows is drawn chiefly from Mr Evelyn Carmichael's article "Carmichael, Earl of Hyndford" in Sir James Balfour Paul, *The Scots Peerage*, 9 volumes (Edinburgh, 1904-1914), IV, 568-573, and from Mr Carmichael's archives at Berrington Hall, Shrewsbury. There are articles on Dr James Carmichael-Smyth and Sir James Carmichael-Smyth in the *Dictionary of National Biography*  
<sup>8</sup> Mr Carmichael has a transcript of this circular  
<sup>9</sup> One of these publications, issued in 1830, is in the British Museum. Mr Carmichael has another, dated the same year, the title of which reads *An appeal to the King's most excellent Majesty, and to the British nation, by William Carmichael-Smyth, Esq thirteen years one of the Paymasters of Exchequer-Bills, from which office he was removed on the 11th of June 1824, by the arbitrary, unjust, inhuman, and illegal FIAT of the late Earl of Liverpool, Lord Viscount Goderich, and Lord Lowther, three of the then Lords Commissioners of his Majesty's Treasury not only without any investigation of his conduct, but even without being made acquainted with the crimes or offence with which he was charged and now denied JUSTICE by THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON*  
<sup>10</sup> In Mr Carmichael's manuscript family book  
<sup>11</sup> The data concerning Major Carmichael Smyth's military career which follow are drawn from Major Hodson, *Officers of the Bengal Army*, IV, 142-143, John Philippart, *The East India Military Calendar*, 3 volumes (London, 1823-1826), II, 337-340, and Colonel H M Vibart, *Addiscombe, Its Heroes and Men of Note* (Westminster, 1894), pp 57-62  
<sup>12</sup> *Letters*, I, cxii-cxiii

- <sup>12</sup> *Ecclesiastical Records* Bengal Commonwealth Relations Office
- <sup>13</sup> Manuscript letter 4 October 18\*0
- <sup>14</sup> Manuscript letter 25 December 18..1
- <sup>15</sup> Manuscript letter to Mrs. Butler 26 October 18\*1
- <sup>16</sup> Manuscript letter from Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth to Mrs. Butler 16 February 1821
- <sup>17</sup> Manuscript letter to Mrs. Butler 4 October 18\*0
- <sup>18</sup> Manuscript letter to Mrs. Knox, 25 December 18 1
- <sup>19</sup> *Letters* II 334
- <sup>20</sup> See *Proterila*, *Works* XXXV 107
- <sup>21</sup> *Letters* II 37
- <sup>22</sup> Manuscript letter 6 December 1856
- <sup>23</sup> Lady Ritchie's manuscript *Reminiscences* of 1878.
- <sup>24</sup> *Miss Williamson's Dispositions* (London 188 ) pp. 150-151
- <sup>25</sup> *Chapters from Some Unwritten Memoirs* pp 16-16, 18-21
- <sup>26</sup> *Letters* II 734.
- <sup>27</sup> The same, p. 38.
- <sup>28</sup> The same, p. 53 See also pp. 309 76\*-763.
- <sup>29</sup> Manuscript letter 6 December 1856.
- <sup>30</sup> *Letters* IV 23.
- <sup>31</sup> The contribution of Major Carmichael-Smyth's brother General Charles Carmichael, was chiefly to provide Thackeray with a model for Colonel Newcome's appearance and manner of dress. See *Letters* IV 196.
- <sup>32</sup> The same, p. 57
- <sup>33</sup> The same, p. 196
- <sup>34</sup> *Works* XXXV 82.
- <sup>35</sup> *Works* XIV 36.
- <sup>36</sup> The same, p. 10
- <sup>37</sup> The same pp. 11-12.
- <sup>38</sup> The same, pp. 13-14
- <sup>39</sup> The same p. 185.
- <sup>40</sup> *Letters* III, 341
- <sup>41</sup> The same p. 350
- <sup>42</sup> *Biographical Introductions* VIII xxxvi-xxxvii.
- <sup>43</sup> *Works* XIV 835
- <sup>44</sup> The same, p. 836.
- <sup>45</sup> The same, pp. 929-930
- <sup>46</sup> The same, pp. 86-87
- <sup>47</sup> The same pp. 953-953.
- <sup>48</sup> Saintsbury *A Consideration of Thackeray* p. 219
- <sup>49</sup> *Works* XIV 1007
- <sup>50</sup> January 1855, p. 93
- <sup>51</sup> 8 August 1855.
- <sup>52</sup> Sir Charles Gavan Duffy *My Life in Two Hemispheres* 2 volumes (London, 1898) II, 119
- <sup>53</sup> *Letters* III, 404-406.
- <sup>54</sup> The same, IV 390
- <sup>55</sup> "Some Gentlemen in Fiction" (1888) *Works* XII 3 4.
- <sup>56</sup> *William Makepeace Thackeray* p 201.
- <sup>57</sup> *Trio* (London, 1938) p. 35.
- <sup>58</sup> Quoted by Henry A. Boers, *The Connecticut Wits* (New Haven, 1920) p. 101 without notation of source. "Mr Shaw says the quotation is authentic," writes his secretary Mr F. E. Lowenstein, in a communication of 6 June 1949; "but he cannot tell you where it occurs."
- <sup>59</sup> *The Quintessence of Iberism*, *Works* XIX, 125.
- <sup>60</sup> Ed. Bradford Allen Booth (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1947) p. 203 Professor Booth preserves Trollope's spelling.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

- <sup>1</sup> *Letters*, III, 415
- <sup>2</sup> The same, p 114
- <sup>3</sup> The same, p 190
- <sup>4</sup> The same, p 254
- <sup>5</sup> Hannay, *A Brief Memoir of the Late Mr Thackeray* (Edinburgh, 1864), p 19
- <sup>6</sup> *Works*, XV, 28
- <sup>7</sup> *Autobiography*, pp 201-205
- <sup>8</sup> *Works*, XVI, 58
- <sup>9</sup> Joaffrosen, *A Book of Recollections*, 2 volumes (London, 1894), I, 305
- <sup>10</sup> *Letters*, IV, 271
- <sup>11</sup> *Works*, XVII, 256 Compare Thackeray's earlier treatment of the same theme quoted above, p 11
- <sup>12</sup> The same, XIV, 1009
- <sup>13</sup> The same, XVII, 619
- <sup>14</sup> "Sterne and Thackeray," *Works*, II, 186-187
- <sup>15</sup> *Letters*, I, 362
- <sup>16</sup> The same, p 153
- <sup>17</sup> The same, p 454
- <sup>18</sup> *Works*, XVII, 619
- <sup>19</sup> The same, XII, 588
- <sup>20</sup> *The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed C E Norton, 2 volumes (London, 1883), II, 229-230
- <sup>21</sup> *Autobiography*, p 155
- <sup>22</sup> *Letters*, I, 460
- <sup>23</sup> *Poems Second Series* (London, 1855), pp 188-189
- <sup>24</sup> Review of *In Our Time*, reprinted in the *Viking Portable Laurence*, ed Diana Trilling (New York, 1947), p 645
- <sup>25</sup> *Letters*
- <sup>26</sup> The same, IV, 419
- <sup>27</sup> *Modern Painters, Works*, V, 210
- <sup>28</sup> *Letters*, II, 347
- <sup>29</sup> The same, p 53
- <sup>30</sup> *The Picture of Dorian Gray, Works*, twelve volumes (New York, 1927), IV, 6
- <sup>31</sup> Hence his denunciation of *Mme Bovary*, after what must have been a most imperceptive and inadequate reading of the novel "The book is bad . . . It is a heartless, coldblooded study of the downfall and degradation of a woman" (H Sutherland Edwards, *Personal Recollections*, London, 1900, p 36)
- <sup>32</sup> *The Common Reader First Series*
- <sup>33</sup> *The Great Tradition*, p 42
- <sup>34</sup> Cross, *George Eliot's Life*, II, 295-296
- <sup>35</sup> "The Novel of Contemporary History," *Atlantic Monthly*, CLXXXIV (November, 1949), 82

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